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WORKS BY THE REV. B. W. MATURIN,

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PRACTICAL STUDIES

ON

The Parables of Our Lord

BY

B. W. MATURIN

AUTHOR OF 'SOME PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE'

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PREFACE

THE object of this book is best explained by its title. It consists of 'practical studies on the Parables.' There is no attempt made at a careful exegesis, or at a detailed commentary on the text. I have merely tried to draw out the leading practical thought, as I conceived it, in each of the Parables, and to apply it. If what has been written should prove of any practical help to those who read it, I shall be more than satisfied.

B. W. M.

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The Sower

THE SOWER

'Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.' . . . 'Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.'—S. Matt. xiii. 3–9, 18–23.

I

THE SOWER.

THE seven Parables in the 13th chapter of S. Matthew are called the Parables of the Kingdom; they follow one another in a close sequence of thought, showing us, under various simple images, the mysteries of the working of grace. The first two Parables tell us the causes of the failure of grace; the natural causes and the supernatural. The third and fourth show, under two different images, the workings of grace, its transforming and fertilising power; the fifth and sixth describe how different types of men awaken to the life of grace; and the last, the final separation, between good and bad, when the time of probation is over, and the work of grace here below has ceased.

In the first Parable our Lord speaks of the natural hindrances, in the second of the supernatural hindrances to the workings of grace in the soul. In the second Parable of the Wheat and Tares, we hear of an Enemy following in the footsteps of the Sower; another sower who plants evil seed in the soil. Here in the first Parable we read of but one sower, one seed, yet of great failures; in many cases the seed cannot grow, but the hindrance lies, not in any external causes, but in the soil; there has been no preparation for the seed, or the preparation has been insufficient.

But this Parable throws a special light first of all

upon the meaning of the gift of grace itself. The sower went forth to sow seed. This is the great work of our Lord, for this He came down to earth. The soil of man's nature is barren, and can produce no perfect fruit; it is in itself incomplete; it needs something to be planted in it if it is ever to be fruitful. However prepared, ploughed, and tilled, it must remain barren until the seed is sown. There are powers lying in the soil which cannot disclose themselves except under the action of the seed. Its full meaning, its full powers are brought out only when the seed is planted. And what is the seed which Christ came to sow in the barren soil of man's nature? 'The seed,' says our Lord, 'is the Word of God,' and S. John will explain to us what our Lord means by 'the Word of God.' 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'[1] 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' 'And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.'[2] Again in his Epistle he says, 'This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life.'[3] This, then, is the seed which the Sower went forth to sow; it is the life of our Incarnate Lord; it is Christ come to impart His own nature to man. 'Christ in you, the hope of glory,'[4] says S. Paul. As the seed understands, and can use the powers that are in the soil, which can never be disclosed except by the seed, so there are powers in man's

[1] S. John i. 1.
[2] S. John i. 16.
[3] 1 John v. 11, 12.
[4] Col. i. 27.

nature which can never be unfolded in their perfection, except the seed of the Divine Life be planted in him ; except the Sower sow His seed.

And this gift is bestowed upon us by a definite act of God towards us. Man can no more get it for himself by longing for it, than the earth can of itself produce a seed. The Sower goes out day by day to sow His seed in the souls of men. It is God's free gift, we do not merit it, we do not understand it at all ; we receive it, it is called the Gift of Grace. Whoever has had this seed sown in his heart is a Christian ; whoever has not, however good he may be, however, in some measure, Christlike he may be, he is not a Christian. A Christian is not merely a good man, nor one who tries to follow the example of Christ ; a Christian is one who, in the language of S. Peter, has been made 'partaker of the Divine nature.'[1] The one great result of the work of Christ is, that it enables man to do 'that which by nature he cannot do.' The difference between Christianity and all other religions is, that Christianity professes to impart *power* to man. Other religions appeal to man's religious instincts ; Christianity gives him something which he does not possess of himself. It is, in the language of S. Paul, 'the power of God unto salvation,'[2] and as S. James says, 'the engrafted Word which is able to save our souls.'[3]

No doubt we often see men who have many and great natural virtues, who do not believe in our Lord, but this need not surprise us. What Christ came to

[1] 2 Peter i. 4. [2] Rom. i. 16. [3] James i. 27.

give was not a gift of nature, but a supernatural gift. No doubt too in a Christian land, under the influences of Christian training and in the presence of the Church, we do see in many who are not Christians virtues that closely resemble Christian virtues, but if we were to transplant such persons into a heathen land and deprive them of all that comes through the presence of the Church, we should find such virtues would soon fail. Men may have by nature all that belongs to nature, and some of the gifts of nature are very noble and very great, but they cannot have aught but what belongs to nature. The soil may be good soil and most productive, but it cannot bear fruit except the seed be sown. When we find one who is naturally proud, and censorious, and passionate, become humble, and gentle, and self-controlled, we ask whence comes this fruit so contrary to nature? and we answer, 'the Sower has sown His Seed;' it cannot be traced to any natural cause; it is the fruit of the Divine Seed of Grace.

The gift of the Christian life is described in the Parable as a seed. It is a germ of life; it has the power of vast development; but it is also capable of being easily hindered in its growth. There is great vitality in the seed, but it is very delicate. The seed has the life within it, but the moment it is placed in the soil, the undeveloped life of the seed is dependent upon the soil. The soil, according to its character, has the power to develop or destroy the germ of life within the seed: it must find its nourishment there.

And so it is with the gift of grace. It is not a magical power that can make us good in spite of

ourselves: it is a *seed* to which the earth of our nature must lay open its bosom and yield up its powers. The seed of grace feeds itself upon, and takes root in the soil of nature.

Thus the Sacraments are not charms: we can place hindrances in the way of their action. Though they convey to us the very life of God Himself, yet the moment they are received they become dependent upon the soil that has received them, whether they are to be fruitful or barren. There is room left for the full exercise of free-will, notwithstanding the mightiness of the gift which is received. Our Lord has thus devised a means whereby the work of our sanctification is, looked at from one point of view, all His, from another, all our own. He gives us the power, but the development of that power depends upon our own will:—'Behold I stand at the door and knock,'[1] the opening of the door must be our own act. He gives, but we must yield our nature to receive, and respond to His inspirations. We might receive the Sacraments every day, and be none the better, if between the seed and the soil there is no correspondence. In the Blessed Sacrament we receive the full gift of Our Lord's own Presence; yet no sooner have we received that mighty gift, than it becomes dependent upon the action of our own will: indeed the extent or the limit of the grace of our communion is dependent upon ourselves, though the gift itself is infinite. If the soil of our nature be like the beaten path, or the rocky ground, or the thorny ground, there will be no perfect fruit from our communion.

[1] Rev. iii. 20.

If only it be the good ground, it can produce thirty-fold, sixty-fold, an hundred-fold.

This explains some of the difficulties about Baptism. A person comes to be baptized who is an adult; we watch him before and after he has been baptized, and we often feel disappointed; it has not the effects that we should expect from what we have been taught to believe Baptism is. We know the habits which he had before, the many faults and imperfections, and we watch anxiously to see the great change effected by Baptism. We believe that Baptism is the new birth of the soul:—'A death unto sin, a new birth unto righteousness'—we expect to see some immediate and momentous change as a result of so great a gift; the old habits broken; the new graces at once showing themselves; but we are disappointed: we see no such changes, perhaps we do not see any change at all, and we ask how can this be? If in Baptism we are born again, if indeed we die to sin, and rise again to righteousness, if it is indeed all that is meant by regeneration,—the imparting to us of the life of Christ,—why do we not see the change at once?—A change like the rising of the dead to life. The answer is, that the *seed* of the Divine life is sown in Baptism; it may grow to perfection, or it may never grow, but it is sown; but it is sown only as a seed. It is not like a great power coming down upon a person, seizing him, and transforming him whether he will or not, but it is a power imparted in its undeveloped state, depending upon the soul to develop it. And just as for many days after the seed is sown in the earth there is no

token of any change, and then after the lapse of a considerable time only the merest indication that the life is working, so it is with the soul which has received the life of Christ in Baptism. The Sower has sown His seed, but the effects will not be seen for many days.

Again, consider the case of a man coming to Baptism in a state of sin without either repentance or faith, from some unworthy motive, and immediately after Baptism returning to his old sins. We ask, Is such a man regenerate or is he not? If he is not, why should he not, if he repents, be baptized again? We answer, the seed of the regenerate life has been sown, but it has fallen upon hard ground, and can produce no fruit. We should urge such a one as S. Peter urged Simon Magus, to repent, to break up the hard soil, and then the seed will sink in, draw forth its nourishment and begin to grow.

What vitality there is in that seed! It may lie neglected upon the hard soil for many years; one may have been baptized in childhood, grown to man's estate, and lived in the indulgence of every passion and sin; never known whether one was baptized or not, and yet no sooner is the soil broken up by contrition, than the seed shows its wondrous life and the transformation begins. That barren soil, nay worse than barren, that soil that has nourished every rank weed of sin, is now beginning to bring forth fruit unto righteousness.

We need not therefore lose faith in the power of grace and in the Sacraments, because we often see little or no fruit resulting from them, any more than

we should lose faith in the life of the seed, because the harvest has been a bad one, or has wholly failed. We should look for the cause of such failures elsewhere. Thus the Parable teaches us that if we would bring forth the fruit of grace, we must prepare the soil of nature with all diligence and care, and we must yield ourselves up to the action of grace. Mar doesn't know himself: the seed knows his capabilities better than he does; no sooner does it enter in than it draws into itself all that it can use out of the soil and blends them together in the texture of the growing plant. What part of that plant belongs to the earth and what to the seed who can tell—so perfect is the union. The life of the seed is everything, yet without the soil the seed is nothing.

Our Lord next proceeds to show some of the causes of the failure of grace. Why is it that different people get such different degrees of help from the Sacraments, some more, some less, some none at all? How comes it to pass, that of two persons making their communion at the same altar, one goes away strengthened and helped, and the other without any help that he is conscious of?

As we have already noticed, the failures which Our Lord draws attention to in this Parable spring only from natural causes. It is not necessary to suppose that the Devil is the cause of all our failures and of all our sins; many of our sins, perhaps most of them, cannot be traced to the work of the Devil at all; the fault lies entirely with ourselves. All the causes of failure mentioned in this Parable were the faults of nature—defects in the soil—they were

not planted there by another as the tares were, indeed they were all owing to the lack of proper preparation; there was not one of them but could have been removed by due care and watchfulness. The one soil that was ready brought forth abundant fruit, though the seed was the same in all. It is important that we should bear this in mind, for in dealing with supernatural powers of evil, we are dealing with great forces: but when the defect lies with ourselves alone, and we can trace the cause of failure to its proper source, the remedy is comparatively easy. Let us consider then these different soils one by one, and the kind of growth that each of them produces. In one or other of them many of us may be able to see the cause of most of our own failures.

(1) 'And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside.' It was probably a beaten path running through the midst of the ploughed field, and as the sower scattered his seed from side to side some of it fell upon this beaten path, and the fowls of the air devoured it. This is the only case in which there is absolutely no growth of the seed at all. The seed never penetrated below the surface of the soil; never took any root. The path lies open to every passer-by, and is constantly trodden upon by those who are coming and going: though once the ground may have been soft and received the impression of every footprint, yet now from the constant traffic it has been hardened. Anyone may tread upon it, but no one leaves any impress behind. What chance has the seed upon such soil as this? It may rest upon it for a moment, but it is powerless to push its

way through the hard crust upon which it falls. Between the seed and such soil, though they touch one another, there is no correspondence, there is from the very first a definite hindrance to any penetration of the soil. There can be no assimilation; the two have for a moment come in contact, but that is all—they are in truth entirely apart—'he heareth the word and understandeth it not.'

This is a terrible and graphic picture of the soul that has lost the power of receiving any deep impression of spiritual things, in which nothing can really sink below the surface. The words which it hears penetrate the ear, but they are never assimilated; they never enter into the soil of the soul, in its present condition it is impervious to such influences. Such is the description of a mind which has laid itself open to every chance passer-by; any thought that offers itself can enter and take its place; there is no mental discipline, no self-control, the mind has set up no protections against the constant whirl of thoughts that come and go, and leave the surface of the soil more hardened, more insensitive. When for a moment such a person comes in contact with the great gift of grace, he may be touched, indeed, there may be an emotional stirring of the surface of his soul for a moment, but when the emotion has passed he settles down again and forgets what has moved him. The mind that is in a constant whirl of dissipation and excitement, that never gives itself a moment to think and recollect itself, cannot feed upon the Word of God. If a man will not think, all the grace in the world cannot help him: if the mind will not

yield itself to nourish the gift that it has received, by contemplation and thought, the seed cannot grow.

'Some seeds fell by the wayside.' God does offer His grace to such souls, gives it to them indeed : but they will not receive it. If then we find that Sacraments and prayer do us no good, that for the moment in which we are under religious influences, our feelings are touched, but that nothing lasts, that nothing seems to have any power to change or deepen us, we ought to ask ourselves whether the fault is not entirely our own. It may be that in our hearts we have blamed God, and thought that He did not do as much for us, or give to us as much as to others ; yet the fault does not rest with God—what can He do unless He has our co-operation ? The life of the soul is the life of thought : if the soul will not live and feed itself upon what God offers, He cannot force it. 'Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber and be still.'[1] Practise mental discipline, set up barriers, and close the beaten path of the soul against those who from long habit assert their right of entry. Keep still and think. Learn to control your thoughts, try to concentrate them, if it be but for a few moments each day, on the things most worth thinking about. Struggle with all your might against superficiality. Think deeply, and so become deep. Don't be content with emotion, *feed* your mind. Such stirrings of the soul as arise within it when under religious influences may be useful and good ; they may act as stimulants to the will, but if they only end in themselves they are worse

[1] Ps. iv. 4.

than useless—they are evil, for they are but sources of self-deception.

We should remember, that the mind with which we think and study, and do our daily work, or which wastes its power and fritters away its strength in idleness, or day-dreams, or vanity, is the same mind with which we pray, and with which we draw near to God. As the mind is all day long, so it will be in the Presence of God. As we think all day long, so we shall think as we kneel at the Altar. The mind quickly forms its habits, and if those habits be of undisciplined carelessness and frivolity, then it can produce no fruit from the seed of God's grace. If our minds have become so dissipated that they have lost the power of thinking out properly the matters which concern our earthly life, it is no wonder that they cannot lay hold of the mysteries of faith.

If then we can trace most of the failures of grace to these causes—mental dissipation and superficiality, we know the remedy—it lies in our own hands. Enclose that beaten path, and shut it out from unrestrained traffic. Try to secure some time day by day for quiet and retirement. Have regular times for prayer, and also for serious thought. Never hear or read anything without thinking it over afterwards, and making it your own. Try in everything, temporal as well as spiritual, to think more deeply and more thoroughly. To an undisciplined mind, there is perhaps no more intense pain than that which is caused by the effort of concentration. But if we are patient and persevering we shall, by God's grace, succeed in recovering the powers of mind which have been

well-nigh lost, and by enclosure, cultivation, and care, the beaten wayside will become good ground.

(2) 'Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth:' . . . 'And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.' Beneath the soil is the hard rock, which is covered with a thin layer of earth. The seed has not enough soil in which to take firm hold and spread out its roots. The roots strike down, as far as it is possible for them to go, till they are hindered by the rock, and then it springs up quickly, exhausts its strength and withers away. Here our Lord describes the soul which fails in two ways: it grows too fast, and it does not give up its whole self to the nourishment of the seed; it will allow the action of the seed to extend so far and no farther. There is a point beyond which the seed of grace cannot penetrate. There is one part of the nature that is incapable of nourishing the seed in its present state. It is composed of two parts: the soft and nourishing soil, and the hard impervious rock. The cause of the failure, our Lord says, was 'because it had no root, it withered away.'

This is not, I think, the description of a superficial nature, such as we last considered: the hard rock beneath the soft surface might, perhaps, be a token rather of strength than superficiality; there is in this nature a definite hindrance blocking the way to the full healthy growth of the Divine seed. The seed unfolds itself and begins to grow and penetrate downwards, till it strikes against the rock, and can go no farther. It is, I think, the description of one who has

never given himself wholly and without reserve to God, but keeps back part. There is a part of this character that has never yet been reached; never touched by Divine grace. How often we meet with these two-sided characters! Men, who on the one side have strong religious instincts, who 'hear the word, and anon with joy receive it;' but another side of their nature remains wholly unsanctified, and as it would seem, untouched by grace. They are conscious of it themselves: after the excitement of their first turning to God, they do not feel sure of themselves; they know that down in the depths of their nature they remain unchanged All the influences of the Divine Spirit penetrate to a certain depth, and there they stop. There is something in such a character that appears to be as hard as a rock compared with the soil which yields itself to the influences of grace. In watching such men we are often puzzled what to think of them: sometimes it seems as if they must be insincere; they are so uncertain and contradictory; at one time they show one side, at another a wholly different side of their character. But they are not greater puzzles to others, perhaps, than they are to themselves: they are certain that they have religious feelings; at times they are ready to do anything, indeed, perhaps, too much, going beyond their own strength, and then there is a great reaction, and the unsanctified nature asserts itself, and places a most definite barrier to the power of God. The roots strike against the rock, and can go no farther.

We must not make bargains with God, or set a limit to His demands, or to our offerings. Yet how

many persons deliberately, and how many more unconsciously, do this. Some men think they have given themselves altogether to Him: but they do not know with how tight a grasp they hold on to themselves, and the plan of their own lives. The Word of God touches them, moves them; so far as it can it takes root in them, springs up and then withers away. With others it is different: with their eyes wide open they have made their conditions; they will give a certain amount to God; they will not give themselves; they do not mean to be led on too far; they will give up certain great sins that perhaps ruled them in the past, but lesser sins and self-indulgences, and an easy and self-ordered life, they will not give up, or even strive against, though they know how great their danger is. And the result of all this is that their life is a failure in both directions—they never bring forth any ripe fruit, either of grace or nature; while bargaining to keep hold of both worlds, they in fact lose both.

If such be our case, let us make up our minds. If we would bear the fruit of grace, and feel its power and its joy, and the strength of its influence, there must be no tampering with evil; no bargaining with God. The seed of grace must have room to grow, or it can bring forth no fruit to perfection. The rock must be cut out at all costs—that which we know to be an obstacle to grace must be removed.

(3) 'Some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.' S. Luke explains this as, 'they which when they have heard go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches and pleasures of

this life.'[1] Under the image of the thorns, then, our Lord includes two wholly different classes of hindrances. He says that the seed of Divine grace which has begun to grow may get entangled and choked by the cares, and the hardships of life, or by its pleasures. The effect of these two very different hindrances is the same—they both choke the good seed. The poor often envy the rich, and think how easy it must be for them to be good, and the rich often feel how few in comparison can be the temptations of the poor; but each state, great poverty and hardship, or great wealth and ease, while acting in different ways, has the tendency to produce the same results in the soul. The supernatural life, the vision of God and of the world beyond, is choked. Heaven grows dim to the eye that is weary with watching and the heart embittered by trial, and heaven fades soon away before the bright glare of this world. 'The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them.'[2]

If our lot be placed in hardships, then, of whatever kind, we must be on our guard against this danger, lest in the difficulties of this world and the hard struggle for existence we forget the next. Labour indeed has its blessing; but how often we find men faint and fall under its weight. Tired out in mind and body, weary, disheartened and discouraged, with nothing to stimulate hope, and all the experience of life but a growing knowledge of its sorrows, they have neither heart nor will to exert themselves to struggle

[1] S. Luke viii. 14. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

through the darkness of this world for the glory which lies beyond. They stumble and fall under the burden which should have led them to Him who said, 'Come unto Me all that travail and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.' It is not the natural effect of labour and hard work to sanctify—perhaps it more often degrades than elevates. We hear much of the dignity of labour, yet such labour, as many know from a bitter experience, is far from dignifying; it leaves them prostrate upon the earth on which they toil. The constant fret and worry to gain the very necessaries of life gradually paralyse the powers of the soul and make it unable to see and strive after the things which are eternal. The cares of this life, like thorns, choke the good seed that had begun to grow and which promised so well. The cares of a large family; the labour of a large parish; the strain of constant work; the overtaxing of the mind, gradually force those that have begun to gaze upwards to turn their eyes to earth again, till at last it becomes impossible to lift the drooping lids, and the eyes become heavy and dull and lustreless, and all high hopes and aspirations die out.

If our position in life, then, places a constant tax upon heart, or mind, or body, we need to be on our guard: the difficulties of such a position, if taken aright, may lead us to look upward for the strength which we cannot get below; but they *may*, and, alas! how often they do, absorb all our energy until none is left for God.

But if poverty, hard work, and trouble have their dangers, so certainly have riches and pleasure.

Acting in a different way, they produce the same result: they choke the good seed. It is difficult for one whose life is spent in a constant round of pleasure and amusement, and who has everything that this world can give, to live for the other world. Many persons, who have had strong religious instincts and who began with great earnestness in their earlier years, have gone into the world and got absorbed in its pleasures, and, after a few years, have wakened up to find that their religious aspirations have gradually and almost unconsciously died out. If we find, therefore, that the pleasures and excitements of social life lower our tone, that they chill our spiritual ardour, and tend to make us lax and careless, we are bound, if we would save our souls, to break away from them. There are many, no doubt, who go constantly into the world and preserve untarnished the purity of their baptismal robe and the simplicity of their faith. There are others whose temperaments are different; they get carried away and lose themselves. Those who like it most will find the world and its pleasures most dangerous. Balaam longed to go to the court of Balak. God, who knew him better than he knew himself, forbade him; but he would go. He went, and the good seed was choked, and he fell into terrible sin. Moses, on the other hand, shrank from returning to Egypt from which he once had fled, and God sent him back there. He went, and in that brilliant court he was protected. Lot saw the comforts and riches of Sodom, and thought, with his strong religious instincts, that he could withstand them. He went there, and though his righteous soul was vexed, we

have but to read the narrative of that last fearful night to see how unconsciously he had become tainted by the evil around him, till at last, to save himself, he had to fly. How much one may enjoy the world's pleasures and enter upon its ways must be a question for each individual to decide for himself. What may be harmless, or even good for one, may be the ruin of another.

If, then, our lot be cast in easy places, and we have much of the enjoyment and many of the good things of this world, and if we find that the effect of all these things is to weaken our faith, and that under their influence our aspirations after holiness begin to fail and our fervour to flag, let us take care, lest it be the choking of the seed that had begun to grow. It may be that we need more strictness, more self-sacrifice, more quietness and retirement; it may be, indeed, that upon such things the very existence of our spiritual life depends.

(4) 'But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold.' If the soil be good, the seed will grow. The seed is the source of life; the soil of nourishment. Each needs the other if there is to be the growing corn. The soil needs the seed if it is to be fruitful; the seed needs the soil if it is to unfold its life. God has given us the seed, the sower has sown it in our hearts; be it ours to leave nothing undone to fit the soil to nourish it. We can spend our labour upon no better work than to pluck up the thorns, to remove the rock, that the soil may be enriched by a full and plenteous harvest.

The Wheat and Tares

THE WHEAT AND TARES

'The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.' . . . 'And his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man: The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom: but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil: the harvest is the end of the world: and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire: so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend; and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.'—S. Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43.

II

THE WHEAT AND TARES

IN the last Parable our Lord showed three causes of the failure of grace: superficiality, lack of perfect conversion, pre-occupation of mind, whether with pleasure or trouble. These either act as a complete barrier to the growth of grace or stifle and choke it.

But all these obstacles lie in ourselves; they are in one way or another the outcome of a lack of self-discipline or proper preparation. They are *natural* difficulties which should be met by proper precautions and with due care. True, indeed, we must look for help from God's Holy Spirit to overcome them, but all that help would be absolutely useless without our own personal efforts. Prayer and Sacraments will not *make* a thoughtless person think, nor one whose mind is overburdened with trouble calm and trustful, without any effort on their own part. These must practise mental discipline, must use natural means, while at the same time they look to God. The mind, with which we do our daily duties, is, as we have already noticed, the same instrument with which we think about God and pray. If, in all the ordinary concerns of life, we are careless and slovenly and lacking in thoroughness, we shall never be able to perform our spiritual duties with earnestness and devotion. Men wonder sometimes that their religious

life is so complete a failure, and they think that God deals hardly with them, but they have only to look at their natural life to learn the reason of these failures. They cannot pray, they cannot meditate, they cannot get any fruit from their communions for the very same reason that they cannot do their work accurately, cannot concentrate their minds even upon the things that are pleasant for them to contemplate.

There are then causes of failure that are purely natural, and they must be met by natural means; 'Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.' [1]

There are not wanting persons who attribute all their faults and all their failures to the personal action of the Devil, but, in fact, it is possible that in many cases the Devil has simply to leave them to their own carelessness, or sloth, or worldliness, and the evil will work itself out. It was not necessarily the Devil who tempted you to that distraction in prayer; it was your own mind, which you had never taken the trouble to train, that fell into its ordinary habit of wandering whither it listed. It was not the Devil that choked that better aspiration before it bore the fruit of a good act; it was your own characteristic way of allowing the thought of some coming pleasure, or the pressure of anxiety, to take possession of your mind and to crush out the thought of better things.

There is the danger with many, in a lazy kind of self-defence, of attributing all their faults to the personal action of the Devil, but at the same there is a

[1] Exod. xiv. 15.

greater danger with others of ignoring the power and the work of the Devil altogether.

In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares our Lord shows us that there is a supernatural as well as a natural cause of the evil that is in us. The good seed is hindered not only by the unprepared condition of the soil in which it is planted, or upon which it falls, but by the Tares which the enemy may sow in the best and most carefully prepared soil.

'The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.'

There are, then, two sowers, the sower that goes out to sow 'his seed' and 'the seed is the word of God;' and the sower which is his enemy, the enemy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who follows in his footsteps to sow tares in his field, that field of man's nature which belongs to Christ.

How often, as we look into our souls and wonder at the evil that we find there, do we not ask of ourselves and of others, 'Whence hath it tares?' How strange it is to see a child, well brought up and carefully guarded from contact with sin, showing one day an evil curiosity or the tokens of a bad knowledge which it has somewhere acquired. Its mother asks, 'Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares?' and she answers herself, 'An enemy hath done this.' She will not believe that that evil is natural to her child. She knows that it must have been planted in her by another, and that other the enemy alike of God and man,—the sower

which, like a dark shadow, ever follows stealthily on the footsteps of our Lord to supplant or to destroy His work.

How often we are startled at the sudden suggestion of evil that comes unbidden into our own minds, as clearly as if the words were spoken in our ears by another, or as if a picture were placed before our eyes. Such thoughts were not suggested by the surroundings. It may be in the most sacred surroundings that, without any warning, the evil suddenly darts into our mind. 'I will not believe that these thoughts are my own,' we protest; 'an enemy hath done this.' S. Paul speaks of the evil of concupiscence, and in a certain sense personifies the evil within him as being distinct from himself. 'If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.'[1] How much more can we say it of a vast deal of the evil that comes to us somehow quite independently of any action of our own will.

Thus we may consider the soul under three conditions: in its own natural condition of mingled good and evil; or as giving nourishment to the good seed of grace implanted in it by the hand of Christ, and bringing forth the divine fruit thirty-fold, sixty-fold, an hundred-fold; or as giving nourishment to the tares of supernatural evil, that evil which has been implanted in it by another sower—the enemy of Jesus Christ.

We have considered how the natural hindrances prevent the growth of the good seed. Let us now see how the supernatural evil works.

[1] Rom. vii. 20.

It is a seed planted in the soil. The seed is sown, and then the sower goes his way; there is no more that he can do. Whether that evil seed ever grows to maturity or not depends altogether, like the good seed, upon the soil.

It is a seed, small, almost imperceptible at first, yet it may be the beginning of the greatest sin. Wrapped up within the folds of the little seed there lies potentially the great tree that one day may grow from it, if only it is planted in a nourishing soil; and from the little seed of evil, a wrong thought or desire, a doubt, a look, a question, suggested by an evil curiosity, springs the great and manifold form of sin, which in time grows to such vast and unforeseen proportions. Many a man can trace back the sin which throughout his life has caused him the most bitter sorrow and the deepest remorse, to something that was said or done or shown him in his early boyhood, which he did not, perhaps, understand, but only had the feeling that all was not right, and which in time grew and laid more and more hold upon him till every power in his nature was sacrificed to nourish the seed which has ruined his life—'the enemy sowed his seed and went his way.' The same evil suggestion may be made to another and may never be able to grow. For however great may be the power of development which the seed possesses, it cannot grow unless it fall into a soil that will give it nourishment.

We are told that many of the most deadly diseases owe their origin to microscopic germs which float about in the air, and that while they are breathed in by multitudes of people, the disease is

caught only by those whose physical state is such as to give nourishment to them. Some breathe them unharmed ; others at once fall victims to their deadly effects. Pestilence is not whimsical nor indiscriminate ; it knows its victims when it sees them coming. To some it means death ; others it is powerless to hurt.

It is just the same with the spiritual disease of sin. The evil sower goes out to sow his seed and some falls harmless upon a soil that from the first rejects it ; others into a soil that quickly assimilates it, and it grows with a terrible rapidity. What a solemn thing it is to see a group of young men going out into life ; to whom among them will it be life indeed, to whom will it be death ? Whom will the fever seize upon and slay ; which of them will be able to reject it and pass through its contagion in safety ? The seed is ever being scattered by the relentless hand of him who fain would make human nature the soil to produce his poisonous weeds ; but, thank God, there are multitudes into whose hearts the seed falls without response and harmless. 'Two men walk through the vilest streets in our city, one of them has nothing in him but selfishness and low love of self-indulgence ; the other is glowing with human charity, seeking perhaps some child of his who has wandered into that dreadful hell, or longing, it may be, to pluck out of the burning some man or woman's life whose fiery iniquity makes those streets the streets of hell. Why is it that one man fills himself full of the iniquity through which he walks, steeps himself in its vileness, and the other comes out with garments all the whiter for the flame ?' In the one case the seed has fallen upon soil which is

all too good and nourishing; in the other case it has fallen upon soil which has hardened itself against it. We might take in this Parable the different soils which are spoken of in the Parable of the Sower and apply them to the evil seed. We might thus see the evil seed fall upon the beaten or rocky or thorny or good ground, each soil being more or less adapted to give it nourishment.

It is, then, with sin as it is with grace. The evil may be planted, but it can only be planted in its germinal state, the growth must depend upon ourselves. No power external to ourselves, no suggestions of evil, no atmosphere, however sin-laden or fevered with contagion, can make us bad. There have been men and women whose lives were lived in constant and close contact with sights of sin, but it never was able to take possession of their hearts; they kept themselves pure in the midst of it all. They are like those of whom our Lord spoke long ago. These signs shall follow them that believe: 'They shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them.'[1] The life that is within them is so strong that it keeps the disease of sin at bay. And there are others whose lives from the very first have been sheltered and protected in no ordinary way from contact with evil, yet who seem to have an instinctive aptitude for catching it and falling a prey to whatever contagion of evil may by chance approach them.

The circumstances and surroundings of life will not make us either good or bad; it depends upon our-

[1] S. Mark xvi. 18.

selves. We must exercise our own free will in the acceptance or rejection either of grace or of sin. God cannot lift us up and sanctify us in spite of ourselves, nor, on the other hand, can all the powers of hell combined force us to commit one single sin against our will. They may suggest it, they may fill the whole air with vileness, they may make pictures of evil dance before our eyes; but it rests with ourselves whether we give them nourishment and let them do us any harm. To us, as truly as to Christ, Satan can but make the suggestion and wait for us to accept or refuse—'Cast thyself down'—but never can he say 'I will cast thee down.' True, we may not know, we never do know in fact, the full consequences of our decision. We do not know all that is involved in the yielding to that first suggestion of evil. Who indeed would yield if he did know? It may have seemed at the moment but a very trivial thing; but we knew that it was wrong, and we knew that we had the power to decide one way or the other. The seed fell into the soil, we accepted it and dwelt upon it, and forthwith it began to grow. The more, therefore, we know ourselves naturally to be inclined to evil of any kind, the more unwearied we should be in watching, lest the seed should be planted which can grow with such rapidity beyond all power of anticipation.

For our Lord says, the seed was planted 'while men slept.' One moment's thoughtlessness, and the evil may be done for a life. The hand of the enemy is stretched out ready to scatter the seed; one half-hour's conversation, one visit, one unguarded look, one question asked and answered, one look into that bad

book, and the seed is sown, and the enemy goes his way, content to bide his time ; but he knows full well, if we do not, the fearful vitality of evil, and perchance he knows better than we do the soil in which he has planted it.

Ah, yes, what would we not give to obliterate from our life and memory the evil learnt in one day, in one hour perhaps ; but we cannot. It seems a terrible punishment for a moment's thoughtlessness, or even for one act of deliberate sin, that it should thus grow and spread and bear fruit and shed seed, and cover not only our own nature, but ruin others also. Yet this is not God's doing ; it is but the working out of a natural law. God's warning against all tampering with evil has, from the very first, ever been the same and the wisest for men : Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil 'ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'[1] It is in the midst of the garden of life, intruding itself upon our thoughts, forcing itself upon our notice. It lies, it may be, upon the road that leads to the Tree of Life ; but God's warning is clear, He bids us keep away from it, feed ourselves upon all the other fruits of the garden ; eat of the Tree of Life and so have no appetite for the forbidden fruit. It is easier to guard against the knowledge of evil, however wearying the watch may be, than to undo its effects. It is better to keep a sleepless vigil while the footstep of the evil sower is heard, than in a moment's sleep to admit him to sow the seed which a lifetime cannot uproot. To remedy the consequences of that first

[1] Gen. iii. 3.

act of evil curiosity committed in Eden, nothing less than the Incarnation and the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ was needed, and even that mighty remedy,—how ineffectual it has proved for many.

Yet it is the one longing which the penitent has, at least at the beginning of his conversion, that he may be as though he had never sinned. Later on, it is true, as he grows in grace he grows in patience, and is more willing, yes, even thankful, to be permitted to bear the consequences of what he has done; but at first, the one longing of his heart is at once and at any cost to pluck up the tares which have been left to grow so long.

The servants said unto Him, 'Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?'—may we not destroy them and have done with them? So does the soul feel when it awakens to the sense of its sin, and often it thinks it can be done, that by a great effort of the will and an earnest struggle it can root out the evil that has grown there, and in time be as though it had never sinned. It is only as years go on and the struggle increases and penitence deepens, that it learns the full, deep meaning of those words of our Lord: He answered to the soul's longing to be rid of the consequences of its past acts, 'Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together till the harvest.' The secret of recovery is, therefore, by struggling, by suffering, and by endurance. Temptation will go on perhaps to the end of life; the two seeds have been sown in the same soil, and each is struggling for the nourishment necessary for its growth, which can be

drawn only from the soil of the soul. This struggle must go on, the memories of the past, the desire for evil, the awakened passion hungering for its indulgence, nature craving after the forbidden fruit which it has tasted, all this must go on. He who has known sin can never be in this world as though he had not known it. Desires have been stirred up in him that other men have no knowledge of; his penitence now must be tested, and the growth of the soul secured by the resistance to those temptations which have been indulged in the past. I will not tell the drunkard that if he turns to God in penitence he will ere long be as the man who never was a drunkard, or the sensualist that soon he will forget or hate his sensuality; I will tell him something better and more inspiring than that, I will give him a more manly hope. I will tell him that he may perhaps be tempted all his life, that he will have to avoid things that other men might do with impunity, that he will see evil where other men may see none, that at times the old passion will waken in all its fury and cry for food with an insistence and an energy that seem at times impossible to resist, that he will feel its cravings like the cravings of one dying of hunger or thirst, that at times he may have to endure agonies both of mind and body to keep himself from a relapse, but that all this is the condition and the earnest of recovery and of final success. He might have lived without ever knowing this fearful struggle; but now he cannot. By this means his sincerity is put to the test, and his will is enabled to recover from the weakness with which it has been prostrated by reason of past sin.

This is what our Lord teaches in His answer to the servants who longed by one strong decisive act to root out the growing evil. It cannot be done. You will pluck up the wheat with it. The habits, both good and bad, that form the character are too closely interwoven; they cannot be destroyed in a moment: there is but one remedy—starve out the evil, let it die for want of food, give it no support, no nourishment, no place for fresh roots to spread; surrender all the powers of your nature, memory and imagination, thought and feeling to the support of the good seed; the tares will die off, and at the time of harvest will readily be separated from the wheat.

This is the hope, the strength of the penitent. This must be his one endeavour, to let no power of his soul or body give a moment's nourishment to the evil that once he delighted in. And this he must do in two ways: first by constant effort against those sins, keeping out of the way of temptation, refusing to let his mind dwell upon that evil upon which in the past it had been in the habit of feeding. But this is not all. It is but poor encouragement to tell a sinner he must not sin; he must *do* something if he is to refrain from evil; he must 'do good,' he must fill his life so full with good things, good thoughts, good hopes, that there is no time to dwell upon evil. If 'his eyes are to be turned away lest they behold vanity,' he must also be 'quickened in God's way.' He must feed upon something, he must have occupation for his active nature, and so he must use his powers to the full in the service of God. Penitence discloses itself not merely in the desire to be rid of sin, but in the effort to do

good. The victory over sin cannot have any assurance of permanence except by the growth in holiness. Bad habits can only be conquered by the formation of good. The reformation of life begins with that interior revolution which consists in 'yielding ourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God.'[1] Let evil be supplanted by good, let the soil of nature give its best gifts to the support of the seed of grace, 'then in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.' Then the dead, dried-up stalks of the tares that disfigured the field will be plucked up and destroyed, and the soil will be completely restored, and the effect of past sin will be remedied. 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;' the garments, once so stained, will be spotless in their restored purity; 'these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.'[2]

[1] Rom. vi. 13. [2] Rev. vii. 14

The Mustard Seed

THE MUSTARD SEED

'The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.'—S. Matt. xiii. 31–32.

III

THE MUSTARD SEED

IN the two former Parables our Lord laid special stress upon the hindrances, both natural and supernatural, to the growth of His Kingdom. This is the prominent idea in both these Parables, rather than the growth of the seed.

From these Parables the disciples might have gathered that of the seed which they should sow three parts would perish without producing fruit, owing to certain hindrances in the soil itself, and that besides these there were further hindrances which would beset even that portion which had taken root in the good soil—the tares planted by the enemy.

Lest, therefore, they should get discouraged at the prospect of so many difficulties, our Lord gives two other Parables to show how His Kingdom should survive these losses and surmount these difficulties, until, small as its first beginnings appear, it should, like a great tree, fill the earth with its branches, like transforming leaven diffuse its potent influence through the world.

It has been suggested that our Lord chose the Mustard seed, not with reference to any greatness which it attains in the end, for, after all, it is but a shrub, but with reference to the proportion between the smallness of the seed and the greatness of the

plant which unfolds from it. He draws special attention to the comparative greatness of the tree as springing from so small a seed.

The Kingdom which He came to found must have seemed small indeed to those who had heard this Parable, and who watched its first growth ; and the difficulties that beset its growth could scarcely be exaggerated. But we have been allowed to see the seed grown into the mighty tree in whose branches the fowls of the air come and lodge.

Has the Parable, then, nothing to teach to us who live in the days when the seed has already grown into the tree? Is the lesson of the Parable only for those who lived when the seed was planted, or when it was struggling to show the first manifests of its life, or for those who now, in heathen lands, are passing through those first experiences afresh? Assuredly not. It has its teaching for every age and for every individual.

For, notwithstanding the spread and the triumph of the Church, each of us has his own personal experience of the smallness and the precariousness of its beginnings. That Kingdom which has spread 'from sea to sea, and from the flood unto the world's end,' whose life and growth we can trace in history, begins anew, as it were, in each separate Christian soul. Whatever we may see or read in its outer history in the world, of its greatness, and strength, and vitality, when we turn within and study its growth in ourselves, we feel its smallness, we perceive the danger that beset its early life, we understand experimentally the meaning of the Parable. Then we see in miniature what those who lived in the first ages of the

Church's life saw on a larger scale in the outer world: the powers of the Kingdom of Heaven, like a seed, like a spark of life, struggling to live amidst forces that seemed determined to destroy it.

What a difference there is between reading about a thing, or even watching and studying something which takes place under our eyes, and experiencing the same thing in our own personal life. We see others suffer, and have our theories as to the purpose and meaning of suffering, and we imagine that we have put our theories to the test of facts, but the first throb of pain which we have to endure ourselves often leads us to change or to modify all our theories; what a difference there is between feeling it and merely knowing about it, or watching with the most sympathetic interest the sufferings of others. We know about sin, we see it all around us, and study its terrible effects; but what is all we see or study compared with the experience gained by the first grievous fall? So we see the Church of Christ spread throughout the world, we read the history of Her growth and struggles, we live again, by the keenness of our sympathy, in those days of persecution, when, at times, it looked as if She must be stamped out and destroyed, we follow Her destinies with the deepest interest. First hidden away from man's sight and spreading out Her roots beneath the soil, then growing like a tender and delicate plant, then all the elements apparently arrayed against Her in the outburst of the storms of persecution. How can She preserve Her life under the biting frost of hatred and scorn? How can She grow amidst such tempests? Again we see Her for a moment victorious and then

crushed almost to death by the triumph of human passion. Again we watch Her struggling for life, beset on all sides by various forms of heresy; unsanctified reason and worldliness arraying themselves against Her. It is the history of a life, tender, fluctuating, uncertain; so delicate that to all appearance it must sink under the first rough blow, and yet with a marvellous vitality that nothing can really destroy. Her history from first to last is the history of one age-long struggle with forces and powers that were to all appearance infinitely stronger than She was, and yet that in some way, mysterious and unaccountable, helped to make Her growth more firm and compact by every new endeavour to destroy Her. And we are able to see Her now with Her roots sunk deep into the soil of human life, and having won for Herself a position from which she cannot be dislodged. Truly the history of this kingdom is well described in the words of our Lord: 'It is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.'

And then we turn within and watch the workings of the life of this same Kingdom in ourselves. There we feel and learn by experience what we have seen in the history of the Church; for it is the very same life and no other which is struggling to live within us, and to transform us, which has transformed the world.

How different a thing it is to experience the workings of that life, and to feel its movements

within ourselves, from the mere study of its history. As we get to understand ourselves and God's dealings with us by His grace, a new light is thrown on that old history. We know and feel it all. We are conscious of the delicate and uncertain throb of a strange life which is not our own, but which is in us and which strives to live amidst strong powers that are in possession and have no mind to surrender, but array themselves with the instinct of self-preservation against that which they feel must rule them if they do not destroy it: the human will, so uncertain, so utterly unreliable, feeling its kinship with this new comer yet afraid of it; the heart, stirred by its presence, drawn to it, and then shrinking from it; the passions, arrayed in deadly hatred, determined to destroy it; the pride of reason, rebelling against its demands. It is but a seed, the faintest spark of life, akin to, yet different from, the life in which it finds itself. It seems so easy to destroy, and yet what power it has of living and turning every antagonism to its advantage.

Yes, we feel it all, we understand by personal experience, with a vividness and appreciation that no study could produce, the strange history of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. Its fortunes in history are but an aggregation of its fortunes in the individual soul. We understand its difficulties, its weakness and its strength. The kind of opposition which it met in the world is the same as that which it has to meet in the individual soul, aggravated and intensified. For the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth is but the life of grace struggling to live in and to transform

the lives of men, and the forces that sought to destroy it are the forces of pride, anger, worldliness, sensuality, sloth—the same which are striving to destroy it in ourselves. This Parable, therefore, does not apply merely to the first planting of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth; it has also its personal application. However old the history of the foundation of Christendom may be, each individual reads that history in some of its main features in his own soul, and learns for himself the full meaning of our Lord's words: 'the kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field.'

But again, while the imagery of this and the two former Parables is to a large extent the same, in this our attention is concentrated upon the *growing* seed. There is nothing told us about it but its growth. No consideration of any hindrances draws off our attention, as in the two former. The soil is good. There is no enemy sowing tares. We are to watch how, under the best of circumstances, the seed of Divine grace will grow.

It grows then by its own law—place the seed in the earth and it knows the law of its own growth. It grows, as our Lord says, 'We knoweth not how.'[1] It grows in its own way. We can but leave it to grow. We may put obstacles in the way of its growth, or we may remove every hindrance and give it room and nourishment, but we cannot make it grow in any other than its own way. We may get impatient at the slowness of the growth of grace and the transformation of our own characters, but we cannot force it;

[1] S. Mark iv. 27.

it will work in its own way, not by any method that we may plan for it.

It is often a great trial to us that, when we lay down certain rules by which great reforms are to be effected, and by which we expect to grow quickly in prayer, and old habits are to give way promptly to new resolutions, and the love of God is to grow sensibly stronger in a given time, the results which we had anticipated do not follow; our plans won't work; the love of God and the power of prayer do not come as we expected, and we get disheartened and perplexed. But we forgot that all these things can only be the results of the growth of a life within us, and we cannot develop that life at the speed that our will would regulate; it grows by its own law. In times of exceptional earnestness we are surprised that we have not effected more fundamental changes, but that when these times pass off we find ourselves so much the same as we were before; the growth is scarcely perceptible. Yes, for "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the earth and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how; for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."[1] It is part of the discipline of the life of grace that we are obliged to learn to be patient; patient with it and patient with ourselves. Quickness of growth does not depend merely upon the ardour of our desires. The growth of grace is the unfolding of an organic life, and we have to wait upon the law of its growth. The farmer ploughs, harrows,

[1] S. Mark iv. 26, 27.

fertilises the soil, then, when all is ready, he puts in the seed, and then he has to wait; impatience will do no good; Nature works her own way, and if the farmer has studied her ways he is not impatient, but he understands all the tokens and the stages of the unfolding life. It is true, much depends upon his work; indeed, the first Parable shows that in one sense everything depends upon it, but when he has done his part he must leave the seed to itself; it understands what must follow—he does not, it is out of his sight beneath the soil; it grows, 'he knows not how.'

But while all this has to a certain extent a discouraging aspect, yet surely it is encouraging too; grace *will* work if only we give it a chance. Grace will triumph if only we do our part in removing the obstacles and surrendering ourselves to its operation. The seed of grace has been planted, we are not conscious of much result; the work is at first altogether hidden from our sight, but at last it begins, the faintest movements, scarcely perceptible, but it is the working of an organic life which must move steadily forward to its end. If it lives it must grow, and it will grow in its own way, not ours. How wholly unlike, how contrary to our fitful and impulsive ways, taking plenty of time, seeming at first to die, then knitting itself into the soil, throwing out tender fibres, spinning its wondrous web, till at last above the soil the blade is seen—just the faintest token of growth—the merest indication of life. But that is enough; that is the regular way: 'first the blade, then the ear.' Those who see but that slender thread of green know that the life is working, and they await the develop-

ment with confidence. And those who see but the feeblest token of the growth of the heavenly seed may take heart and have courage—all is well—only be patient and trust, and the blade will develop into its perfect growth.

If we had, so to speak, to manipulate the seed ourselves, and to arrange the plan and method of its growth; if it grew by no law, but each had to conduct the whole process; if, in other words, the growth of grace were not that of an organic life, then indeed we might despair, and the best intentioned by their blunders or ignorance might destroy it. But it is not so; we yield ourselves to its action, we remove all that can hinder its workings, and we let it work and grow, and as it grows it reveals its own beauty to our eyes. We feel its action, we see its fruits, we know that it is transforming, enriching us. We wonder that a thing so small in itself can unfold such powers. We have been, as it were, but lookers on, watching the marvellous growth that endows us with gifts which by nature we had not.

Yes, truly, if the slowness of its processes is trying to our patience, the result is worth waiting for. It is so different from anything we could have planned for ourselves, it so far transcends all our hopes and dreams, we can but say, 'This hath God done.'

But once more, the seed is the germ of a life which descends from a higher kingdom into a lower one to lift it up. There is no life in the mineral kingdom—all is still, silent, motionless. There are other kingdoms all around it and touching upon it endowed with gifts vast and wonderful compared with what it possesses,

but it has not the power to enter into, nor the faculties that would enable it to know of these glorious worlds. Can it ever rise and enter into a kingdom higher than itself, and acquire gifts which it has not? Yes, but it cannot rise by itself or push its own way up. A visitor from the kingdom above it must come down into it, take into and wrap around itself the elements of that lower world, and lift it across the barrier into its own kingdom. So the seed takes up the dead earth, imparting to it wonderful gifts of form and colour and perfume, penetrating all with its own life, moulding and shaping it, and forming combinations and results otherwise impossible. It lifts those elements that it finds in a lower world into its own, and the earth enters into the life of the plant and passes into another kingdom. The earth cannot of itself be anything but earth, but when it yields itself to the power of the seed it becomes a new creature. It can do nothing of itself, nor does it understand anything of the process of its transformation; the secret of that knowledge is in the seed; it can but yield itself to the power of that life which has come down into it to raise it.

It is the same with the seed of grace. It comes a visitor from the Kingdom of Heaven into the lower kingdom of human nature to lift it up into that world whence it has come. Man cannot raise himself beyond the limits of his own nature; he knows neither the way nor the end. He is conscious that there is a higher world, but he knows nothing of it and he is bound to the earth. The seed of the Divine life comes from that higher world into his nature, clothes

itself with it, and raises it across the barriers. Man, like the earth, must surrender himself to the operations of this new force, this life which has entered into his nature; the more complete the surrender the more perfect will be the transformation.

Everything that we see in the flower is of the mineral world, yet the flower itself is no product of that world, but all is penetrated with, formed by, the life of the seed—the form, colour, everything, is the result of the action of that life; it moulds the leaf, tints the petal, endows it with all its charm and beauty; and though its roots are in the earth, it lives in another world and breathes another atmosphere. It has but to let go of this life through which it has risen, and it sinks at once into the shapeless, motionless mass of inert matter from which it was taken.

So it is with man transformed by grace. All that we *see* is man's nature, his acts, his words, but the whole form and tone of the character is penetrated with a life that is not his—the life of grace. The man is changed, transformed, lifted out of the lower kingdom of the world into the Kingdom of Heaven; like the tree, he rests upon the earth, but lives in another world. The Christian character is the perfect blending of the two lives—the life of nature and the life of grace; but the formative principle, the dominating force that constructs out of the earthlines of our nature the fair combinations which blend to form the Christian virtues, this is the work of the seed of grace. So 'the kingdom of heaven is

like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.'

The Leaven

THE LEAVEN

'The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.'—S. Matt. xiii. 38.

IV

THE LEAVEN

NOTHING could be greater than the contrast between this Parable and the former. It is not possible to describe in any one image the workings and methods of the Kingdom of Heaven. We read one description as it is drawn for us by the Hand of Christ in the form of some simple type, and it seems, as we fix our attention upon it, that it is a living picture of what we see and what we experience in our lives. Then we turn to another wholly different, which brings out another set of phenomena wholly different, but equally true to experience. It is impossible to bring so wide-reaching and many-sided a thing as the Kingdom of Heaven down to any simple definition. It can only be grasped through studying it from different points of view. Yet all these various analogies are drawn from the simplest events of ordinary life.

The former Parable showed us the way in which grace grows in the soul—it grows by its own law. As the seed is buried in the soil and unfolds its life, drawing its nourishment from the soil, so the gift of grace grows in the soul of man. Another life planted in the depths of the old life growing out of it, assimilating what it can and rejecting what it cannot, and at last manifesting itself in its perfect form, the outcome of the action of the seed upon the soil. But the chief

point to which our attention is especially drawn is the method of the growth. It works by the law of its own organic development; 'first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.' All is orderly and methodical, and manifests itself in a seemly and well-shaped form. Each step in its growth is well proportioned and duly ordered.

We saw that the fact of grace developing in this way is a matter of encouragement. We have not to plan the method by which it is to grow; we have but to remove all obstacles and yield ourselves to its action.

But then we ask again, Is this true to our experience? and we turn to examine our own lives. What do we see of order, of form, of anything approaching a steady development upon clearly marked and well-defined lines? What does it all look like? Is there anything that it resembles less than a growing plant, almost every stage of whose growth we can tell beforehand? Certainly there are no retrograde steps as the seed unfolds and passes steadily onwards through the stages of its growth—blade, ear, and full corn. There is no unevenness of growth. It may be held back for a time by such uncongenial circumstances as frost and cold, but remove these and it proceeds again in its proper course—a course which we can accurately foretell.

Is this the type of our spiritual growth? Is it not rather true to say that whatever else may be, this certainly is not? We look at ourselves and we say the leading feature in our spiritual life is perhaps disorder. Inward stirrings; blind, restless movements

towards no clearly perceived end. To-day uplifted and quickened by strong emotions, to-morrow a collapse of all that seemed gained. How indefinite and disorderly it all is. How irregular and undisciplined. What can it all end in? What does it mean, these yearnings and longings that never seem satisfied; wrestlings now with one sin, now with another? A fermentation, now in this direction, now in that, and then an apparent breakdown and a sinking earthward of the whole nature. Certainly there is nothing less like the growth of a plant. There is no assurance of growth at all, nothing shapely or well formed; it all seems a blind struggle of a living force with a dead, heavy, unquickened and unspiritual nature. At times we are conscious of the great burden of vast portions of our nature, untouched by grace and presenting a weight of resistance like a mass of inert matter. Now the mind, stupid, heavy, uninterested; now the heart, cold, earthly, indifferent; now the body, weighing down the spirit as it tries to soar upwards. Is not this to many the history of their spiritual life?—a spark in the midst of a stifling mass of unilluminated matter, striving to kindle it, burning up for a moment as if it was all aglow, then smouldering with scarcely a token of life. A day of vivid faith and spiritual perception followed by a day of stupor and sensuality.[1]

But then we turn to this Parable, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.' And everything becomes illuminated and

[1] See a Sermon on this Parable in Canon H. S. Holland's 'God's City' (*Longmans*).

interpreted. What more vivid picture could be drawn of all such experiences? The leaven seething in the heart of a sodden, inert, sluggish mass of dough, probing, penetrating, fermenting, conquering the dead weight that hangs round it, that seems as if it would stifle it, but which, as a matter of fact, is its proper home. It has for this a remarkable affinity. It understands it and can live and thrive in it. Nothing else could live there, such conditions would paralyse the action of any other life; but the leaven can, this is the very soil in which it can thrive, the atmosphere that develops its life. No sooner is the leaven placed in this torpid mass of matter than it knows itself to be in its true sphere of action; here it can grow and work as nowhere else. There is an outgoing of its forces, an irresistible spread of its heat and energy, and it will work there till the whole is leavened. But who can understand the method of its work? What less like an organic growth this pushing and upheaving and fermentation; this constant rising and falling of the material in which it spreads? What more hopelessly lawless and irregular than all these blind and purposeless movements? What more unlike that other picture which appeals so strongly to our sense of order and fitness in the working of God: 'The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field'?

Yet, as a matter of fact, these two images are not so opposed as they seem; both are, in truth, the growth of an organic life. The working of the leaven hidden in the meal is as truly the growth of a plant as the

seed hidden in the earth. Its growth does not seem so orderly and well defined, we may not understand the method of its working so well, but there it is, spreading and growing like a plant, and when we get to analyse and understand it better we shall see. Not much like a plant indeed this tumultuous disturbance bursting forth in the midst of the formless meal. But, nevertheless, it is a plant, and the growth is, as a matter of fact, as regular and as truly under law as the growth of the mustard tree. Our Lord speaks of it as 'the Kingdom of Heaven,' working as it were steadily out towards a well-formed and organised kingdom ruled by laws and principles that are changeless.

What a consolation this is. As we are conscious of the seeming disorder of our own spiritual life, the blind and passionate struggles, with no clear aims, no certain or orderly prayers, we turn to the Parable of the Leaven, and we say, 'Can all this that is going on in me, so much that is nameless, so much that baffles definition or analysis, can all this be a real growth? Can this disorder in the eyes of a more enlightened mind be in reality order? Does this mean the growth of grace, the triumph of the life of Christ, the victory of the laws of righteousness over our lawless and rebellious nature?' And we turn to the Parable, and we say, 'the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.' Yes, it will work till the whole nature, body, soul and spirit, is penetrated and transformed by its influence, and this is just the way in which it works, like Leaven in the meal;

law under the appearance of disorder ; growth taking upon itself, at times, the appearance of decay. Watch the working of grace in your soul and see if it could be better described. There is the presence of a life within that can only grow and develop in that nature whose object seems to be to stifle it. Yet there is a remarkable affinity between these two. The grace of God can live in that heavy, dull, unspiritual environment ; can draw from it its nourishment, can transform it. Through its mass it sends its beating pulses ; it makes it throb with stirrings that do not belong to itself ; it quickens movements all over it, now in one part, now in another. It stirs, it boils, under its action. There are strange things going on within of which we can only get the surface effects. There is a life struggling with a thing that is dead, and that it is determined to bring to life, though at times it seems as if the sodden mass is only trying to kill the life that has taken possession of it. Yet it is not ; it is, on the contrary, yielding itself to nourish this strange life. But to all appearance the action seems to be without any purpose, any plan. There is nothing that looks less like life, still less like growth, and yet in the end the whole is changed and transformed ; the Leaven has penetrated everywhere, conquered throughout ; it never ceases its action till the whole is leavened. Such is the Kingdom of Heaven in the soul of man.

But again. The former Parable had to do with the seed and its growth and the hindrances to its growth. Here the corn has ripened and is gathered and ground into flour. We see no longer the good and bad soil, or the good and bad sower ; the field,

which our Lord said is the world, is lost sight of. We are no longer under the open canopy of the heavens and exposed to the accidents of sunshine, rain, and frost, or the spite of the enemy who may sow tares amongst the good seed. All this is changed; we are within the precincts and the limits of a house, under the shelter of a kindly roof. There are safeguards that are permanent against the constant changes of the outside world. The fire is on the hearth, and can always be kept alight. The protection against the accidents of the changing elements is certain and secure. In the former Parable, the work that had to be done must to a large extent depend upon these accidents; there was nothing to shield and protect the growing plant. It was exposed to the same difficulties to which all kinds of life are exposed. The sower could but sow and wait for sunshine or rain. The same sunshine and rain which developed the growth of the wheat would develop the growth of the tares also. The heavenly seed was to all appearance wholly unprotected. It must grow by the same law and exposed to the same accidents as every other seed. There was no special providence which assured to it, more than to any other, immunity from danger and accident, or all that was necessary for its growth. 'The field is the world,'[1] and the Kingdom of Heaven is planted in the midst of the world, and exposed to all the forces and dangers that act upon and through the world. 'The children of the kingdom and the children of the wicked one grow side by side in the same field. As in another

[1] S. Matt. xiii. 38.

Parable, the men with the talents must go into the great market-place of life, and struggle, and compete, and work there, if the five talents are to grow into ten or the two into four. The Christian has to live and work side by side with him who is not a Christian. His life, his circumstances, his surroundings, his difficulties are the same. He is not sheltered from these things because he is a Christian. He is not, for the most part, permitted to escape from any of them. It is the very same set of circumstances which develops grace in the one which develops sin in the other, trouble, temptation, suffering, care.

Yet this Parable shows us that such is not in fact the whole case, though it may appear to be so. For, however unprotected the Christian may seem to be in the world, though to all appearance there is nothing in his surroundings to betoken any special care or providence, yet he is protected, he has not to fight alone, he is not simply left to the accidents of the world ; he is a member of a family bound together for one purpose and united with one aim. He is housed and sheltered and cared for. The house cannot indeed be seen by everyone, for, 'except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'[1] But those who are within see it and know how true its protection and shelter is. Temptations and trials do not come to the inmates of this House of God at haphazard. There is a Presence within that watches over all. The Woman, when the Leaven has done its work, places the leavened meal on the fire. The fire must penetrate it. It is the fire that gives it shape,

[1] S. John iii. 3.

coherence, firmness, and makes it palatable. Till the fire has done its work it is soft, plastic, ready to take the shape of anything that touches it.

But it is the Woman who tempers the heat according as it is needed. And what is that fire but the heat of temptation developing and perfecting the work of grace. The action of the Leaven is useless without the work of the fire. 'My son, if thou wilt seek the Lord, prepare thy heart for temptation.' And the Parable shows that both these offices belong to the Woman—the taking the Leaven and hiding it in the meal, and the placing the leavened meal upon the fire. 'Then was Jesus led *of the Spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted.'[1]

Are, then, Christians, left, as they seem to be, in the open field to be acted upon only by the same influences and forces as act upon every other life—dependent wholly upon the sunshine and rain, and exposed unprotected to the biting frost? All these things it is true do act upon them as upon others, but there is another side unseen to men. The house, the Woman's watchful care, the tempering of the heat to the needs of the leavened meal, the shelter and protection, the wise and personal ordering of all things that it may be made meet for the Master's table. All these things are provided of that Master's loving forethought, Who has committed those whom He has called out of the world to the guardianship of Her who is the Mistress of His House.

[1] S. Matt. iv. 2.

The Hid Treasure
AND
The Pearl of Great Price

THE HID TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field: the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.' 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.'—S. Matt. xiii. 44–46.

V

THE HID TREASURE, AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

THE two following Parables—the Parable of the Hid Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price—were not, like those which precede them, spoken to the multitude. After the Parable of the Leaven, our Lord 'sent the multitude away and went into the house,'[1] there the disciples came to Him and there He taught them these two Parables.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not merely a general thing, it is also an individual and personal thing. It is not merely a tree overshadowing the earth, or Leaven leavening the world, it is a thing which a man must lay hold of and appropriate and make his own. He may, indeed, dwell in the field where the good seed is growing, or rest under the shadow of the great tree, or watch the heavy mass seething and quickened under the action of the Leaven, and so in a certain vague sense share in the benefits of the Kingdom of Heaven, as many do, living in a Christian society; but this is very far from being enough; none receive the essential gifts of the Kingdom of Heaven till they have personally appropriated its benefits. And these two Parables give us the history of this personal experience.

[1] S. Matt. xiii. 36.

They describe under two entirely different images this same event—the individual soul coming into personal relationship with the great Gift of God to man.

In each case there is this in common—a discovery. They both see what they had never seen before, and neither of them, having once seen it, could rest till he had made what he had seen his own, though it cost him 'all that he had.' The thing that each discovered was not new, it was in the world long before either of them had seen it or even dreamed of it; but it was *to them* a discovery. They saw, they touched, and finally they possessed what was to them an altogether new thing. Henceforth that discovery changed their whole lives; it was more to them than all else they possessed. All that they had ever gained by past toil they sold to purchase this newly found Treasure.

Such is our Lord's description of the individual apprehension of the gifts of that great Kingdom which He came to found upon earth. Men live in contact with it, feel and see its influences, understand its organisation, watch the work it does, measure its effects upon the world and upon society, read its history, are in daily intercourse with those whose lives are wholly formed and governed by its power, and yet—have never really *seen* it, have never come into any personal relationship with it. Then their eyes are opened, somehow they *see* it. It is a reality, a wondrous reality, more real, indeed, than anything else—the one reality in life. There it was before, under thier very eyes, but it was hidden; so far as

they were concerned it did not exist, it was nothing to them, 'their eyes were holden that they should not know it;'[1] now they cannot rest till they have made it all their own; 'their eyes were opened and they know it.'[2]

They have come in contact with, have seen the supernatural, and that is an event which they will never be able altogether to forget or deny; a positive fact which, for reality, stands alone in their experience and which nothing will be able really to obscure. How strange that men should be constantly discussing and living in the midst of that which, for all practical purposes, they do not see. What an event that is when their eyes are opened and they find the Hid Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price. And this is an experience that is of almost daily occurrence. 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field: the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field,' and it 'is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.'

Almost daily someone stumbles, as it seems, across that Hid Treasure and gives up everything to possess it; almost daily some one in search of goodly pearls finds the One for which he is ready to sell all he has that he may buy it. Is it not most true that there are many people who belong to the Church, and take much interest in Her work and

[1] S. Luke xxiv. 16. [2] S. Luke xxiv. 31.

development, receive the sacraments and are regular in their religious duties and take keen interest in the religious controversies of the day, who have never yet seen in the field of the Church the Hid Treasure? And then something happens; they pass through some experience—illness, trouble, great temptation, perhaps—and their eyes are opened, they see beneath the surface. Their interest, their activity, had been about the field, now they see for the first time the Treasure hid in the field; they learn in a moment the reality, the only thing that makes the field worth possessing. There it lies, that Treasure hid so long, now exposed, as it seems, by some chance to their view—they see it, they may possess it. At once the whole attitude of mind undergoes a change. This field becomes a matter of directly personal interest; they see in it now a new worth. This is the secret why all that concerns it has a strange fascination,—it has a value far greater than those who are busiest in its concerns are aware of; there is a hidden mystery. And when that mystery is revealed, one after another of those whose eyes are opened to see it give up all else for it. It is no longer one interest out of many, it is *the one* for which all else is abandoned.

Such is our Lord's description of the intimate and personal relationship which the individual soul must have to that vast Kingdom which spreads throughout the world, having its own organisation and life, and which is in its appearance so impersonal. Like any other great organisation it can awaken interest and create enthusiasm amongst its members, it can draw multitudes to devote themselves to the cause which it

has at heart. Yes, in all this it may act only as any other kingdom of this world can act. But if this is all, it is practically nothing—it must do more. The individual soul must find in this Kingdom the Treasure hid, as in a field, which becomes his own personal possession. The eye must be opened to see the inner glory which makes it precious even to its outermost skirts. To get possession of that gift which the Church has to give, the soul is ready to sell all that it has.

So too, the Merchant Man, seeking goodly pearls, sees at last One before which all the others look poor and mean. In the course of his search, he comes across it, and all that he has ever had looks worthless. One glimpse of that priceless Pearl kills all his interest and pride in what he already possessed, all that he had spent his life in collecting is seen in a moment to be of little worth compared to this; they appeared to him of value till he saw what was of real value. Seen in the lustre of this priceless Pearl they look worthless and poor. He cannot rest till he makes it his own.

But while these two Parables agree in thus bringing out the idea of the soul's awakening to a personal realisation of what it had never perceived before, and the readiness to make great sacrifices to possess itself of the newly found Treasure; in all the rest they are in striking contrast.

In the one case there is a long search; the Merchant Man finds at last what he had spent most of his life in seeking for. He had been ever on the look out for goodly pearls, seeking the most valuable he could

find, and ready ever to exchange the less precious for the more precious.

In the other case, the man stumbles across the Treasure without any search or trouble on his part; the plough or spade strikes upon it while he is employed about something else, and, in a moment, it is laid bare to his view.

How strange it seems, yet how true to experience, that one who has always been in earnest, and has ever sought for the noblest and best things in life, should, only after a long search, at last succeed in finding it, while another seems to have the Treasure thrown in his way, without any effort or search on his part.

Yet it certainly is true. There are some to whom God gives in a moment what another only gains after a long lifetime of painful search. 'I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.'[1] Bartimæus cried after Jesus, and spent the night in Jericho in search of Him, while He had gone unbidden to be the guest of Zacchæus, the publican.

For the two Parables describe two different types of character. There are some who never can be content with the things of this life, who feel that there must be some absolute good for man, in which alone he can find the satisfaction of all his longings; they weary themselves with questions that never trouble others, life presents to them difficulties that stimulate them to seek for an answer. Often such men do not know God, yet long, with a passionate desire which makes all that life has to give dim and worthless in

[1] Rom. x. 20.

comparison, to know Him. They have, indeed, given up whatever of pleasure and rest worldly enjoyment could afford them to find the secret of their soul's longing. Sometimes such men are to be found amongst the heathen, their one study, their only search is for God. Sometimes they are to be found amongst ourselves, often in various imperfect forms of Christianity, often professing themselves unable to accept any organised form of Christianity at all, but wherever they are met, they impress all who know them with the seriousness and earnestness of their character. They are like Merchant Men, seeking goodly pearls.

How strange it seems that God should leave such men in darkness, while He gives others who value it so much less, the light. How strange, we sometimes feel, that so much of life should be wasted in the search for the truth, and spent often in various forms of error. But, surely, it is not waste; the Merchant Man in search of goodly pearls is ever learning to understand their value. His touch, his eye is getting practised; he is becoming quicker in detecting the most valuable—all those years of search are a preparation. He has long learned to be ready to part with past purchases for new discoveries, his desire and appreciation are quickened, and at last, in the language of the Parable, 'When he had found one Pearl of Great Price,' he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.'

The language is very calm and simple, yet it discloses an heroic spirit. It tells of a man who at sight of something of more worth than he had, was ready to give up the whole result of a life's hard work. Surely

no moment of such a life was wasted while he was possessing himself of the best he could find ; the whole character was steadily bending in one way to fit him for the last great discovery—the last great sacrifice.

And S. John tells us in the Apocalypse what that Pearl was of which the Merchant Man was in search. He says of the Heavenly City, whose foundations were garnished with all manner of precious stones, that 'the twelve gates were twelve Pearls, every several gate was of one Pearl.'[1] He was seeking all unconsciously for the very Gate of Heaven.

And then there are others who have no such ambitions. The multitude who live in the present and do not look much beneath the surface ; or those who, however great their capacity for better things, are nevertheless living for the things of earth. And so they would go on living did not God in His mercy lay bare to their eyes the Treasure hid in the field. They spend their time in planting and reaping what grows upon the surface of their nature, while deep down beneath lie the true riches, the Hid Treasure. And then it may be the plough of the Cross lays it bare and the soul looks within and sees the priceless Treasure so long hidden and unused.

And the contrast between this Parable and the other is striking. In the former, 'when he had found one Pearl of Great Price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.' It seems as though the finding were the necessary end of that long search, and there is the calm and strong resolve to possess it at all costs. But in this Parable the discovery is all unexpected, unpre-

[1] Rev. xxi. 21.

pared for, and the man is filled with joy. It is in the strength of that joy that the finder of the spiritual Treasure is enabled to part with everything besides. There is no compulsion, no command, 'for joy thereof' he cannot do otherwise. All other things have now no 'glory by reason of the glory which excelleth.'[1]

Amongst many others, one describes the truth of this Parable from his own experience. S. Augustine, telling of the crisis of his own conversion, describes how easy it became, having found the Treasure, to give up all which he had long dreaded to give up, through this joy. 'How sweet did it at once become to me to want the sweetness of those toys, and what I feared to be parted from was now a joy to part with. For Thou didst cast them forth from me, Thou highest sweetness. Thou castedst them forth and for them enteredst in Thyself, sweeter than all pleasure.' He parted with these sinful delights; he went and sold all that he had, that he might buy the field.

However great the contrast in other points, both Parables are alike in this, that the field which holds the Treasure, and the Pearl, can only be purchased at a great price. The words in both cases are the same: 'he went and sold all that he had to buy it.' It was a great exchange; a new possession purchased at the price of everything they possessed already. Our Lord would not have us suppose that the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven can be gained easily. Those whose eyes have been opened to see it know this well. But they realise its value, and one, filled with

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 10.

joy at the sight of it, the other, compelled by an overwhelming conviction which was the outcome of a long experience, are ready to sell all that they have that they may enter into the personal possession of its riches.

If we are not prepared to pay the price we must not complain that we do not enjoy its blessings. If we, too, have been permitted to get a momentary glimpse of all that the Kingdom of Heaven may be to us and may give to us, and then shrink from the price of the purchase, we must not be surprised if we never are partakers of its full joys. The remedy for such dissatisfaction lies in our own hands; if we pay the price we shall become possessors of all that it has to give. The terms are laid down for us in the Parable—All for all. If we sell all that we have to buy it, we shall become full possessors of its infinite and eternal blessings.

Many persons sacrifice the full enjoyment of the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of Heaven, they have had their vision of that other Kingdom, and consequently cannot settle down to this world as their home, but they cannot make up their minds to pay the heavy price which is the condition of the possession of the Heavenly Kingdom, and so they are unhappy in the world, for the thought of that other vision haunts them, and they are unhappy in their religion, for they have never been able to possess themselves of its blessings. But the remedy is at hand, there can be but one remedy now; there never can be the old easy-going enjoyment of life; its spell has been broken, they have caught a glimpse of that other glory which

excelleth. Let them go, sell all that they possess, sooner or later they must leave it, now they can use it, let them use it as the purchase money to possess themselves of that Kingdom that passeth not away; a Kingdom 'that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.'[1]

[1] Heb. xi. 10.

The Draw Net

THE DRAW NET

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind : Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world : the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.'—S. Matt. xiii. 47–50.

VI

THE DRAW NET

IN the former Parables we have seen under different images the Kingdom of Heaven growing like a plant, working like leaven in the meal. We have seen different types of men awakening to its claims, and coming into personal relationship with its gifts, appropriating its blessings as a thing so valuable that they are ready to sacrifice all that they possess for it.

But it is necessary to take a wider view, and to see this Kingdom of Heaven as a whole ; to watch it at work, and to see it as it is in itself. For it is as bewildering a thing to study it as a whole, as it is to watch its workings in our own souls. It is so different in many respects from what we should have anticipated, and yet so true to our Lord's prophecy of what it was to be.

We are to see, then, a great organisation in the midst of the world ; seemingly a part of that very world against which it bears witness. It is to be distinct from it, yet not altogether apart from it ; it is to separate those who belong to it from those who do not, yet in such a way that there are no visible barriers set up to obstruct the relationship between those who are within the Kingdom and those who are outside of it. It is a Kingdom with its own aims and motives, quite different from, often directly

at variance with, those of the world, and yet it is to be largely influenced by the movements of the world at every different age.

Our Lord's picture of this Kingdom of Heaven in this Parable is not an ideal picture of the Church as it exists in His Mind—that picture is given us elsewhere. Here He draws it for us to the life, as we know it and see it, and He explains to us many of those startling anomalies and contradictions which often present great difficulties to faith.

He takes us, then, in this Parable out of our present surroundings, living as we do amidst the elements of the earth in which the Church finds Her existence and Her struggle, and He bids us come up into another atmosphere, out of all this mixed condition of things, and look down. 'Come with Me,' He says, 'up into the higher air in which I stand and look down upon what is going on in that lower element in which the Church and the world have their home. Living in the denser atmosphere of earth, it is impossible to see and understand, to separate those two kingdoms which are so closely related yet so different in their origin and work. Feeling the tides and currents of earth penetrating everywhere, it often seems to you as if the Church must get carried away and swamped by the stronger forces of earth. You have often dreamed of a Church surrounded by a wall great and high, with closed doors, behind which Her citizens can live a cloistered life, untouched by the movements around Her. A city of refuge into which the weary can run and be safe. Come up here where I am, and look down. See how clear it all is; how true at once to

experience and to the purpose of God. You are right in expecting a Church that can give you refuge and protection against the world; you are wrong in the kind of protection you look for. You are right in looking for a Church whose organisation is strong enough to withstand all the antagonism and deceit of the world; you are wrong in the kind of strength you look for. That strength is not the unbending strength of a wall; it is the elastic strength of a net. You are right in looking for the supernatural control and guidance of the Church; you are wrong in expecting to find it uninfluenced by the tides and currents which are ever streaming through it, but can never wrench it from the controlling Hand that holds it. Look down into that dense atmosphere from which I have called you up and see. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."'

'A net cast into the sea;' let down from a higher world, out of a different sphere, framed to work in a rougher and coarser element than that in which its texture was fashioned—such is the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a net, made for the sea; all is fitted for its work there; its whole design finds its interpretation in the element in which its work is to be done. It is not perhaps the most perfect thing conceivable, but it is the best when we consider the place and the circumstances in which it is to find its home. It has to deal with strong, passionate, rough, unreasoning forces; it has to enclose a vast multitude

that often in the strain of circumstances rush, or are driven blindly by the sweeping currents, against the restraints that enclose them; it has to live amidst changing tides and unexpected currents; its home is in an unstable and shifting element that has dormant within it tremendous forces which seem governed by no law and swayed by no motive but destruction. Therefore, if this Kingdom is to be strong, it must have, not the strength of a fortress built upon a rock, which has to stand against powers that can be foreseen and measured, but it must have the strength that can bend and move and yield with the currents, that can stand against a storm or the strain of a heavy pressure, and have sufficient elasticity to recover itself. The unyielding strength that can resist for a time the dash of the waves and the violence of the storm is worn out by the constant fretting of the waters; the fabric of the net is made so as to live in the sea; the texture is light and open and elastic, and its very strength arises from this power to yield and to be penetrated by the waters. It is not the strength that asserts itself, and bears witness to its own power; no, to all appearance it is devoid of strength, but experience shows how much stronger it is than other things that look more robust.

So it is with the Church; while other institutions have worn out or given way under the strain of popular uprising, or been lashed to pieces by revolutionary upheavals, the Church has been able to live on; She was fashioned to live in heaving tides, and sweeping currents, and restless seas. The web of Her organism is so woven that She need fear none of

these things. That inorganic heavy mass of netting lying in its formless bulk upon the shore, throws itself out, opens and becomes living in the waters ; it has no fear there, it is in its own element, it knows perfectly how to deal with it, how far it must yield, when it must be firm, its apparent weakness, its perfect adaptability is its strength. Some massive pile of rock upon the shore falls at last with a crash, the waters have undermined it ; while the yielding net does not present sufficient resistance to feel the stroke of those great waves ; it eludes their thundering blows, lets them pass through, and recovers itself. So the Church in Her seeming weakness is stronger than any other institution ; the waters are 'peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues,'[1] and amidst these treacherous elements the Church alone is safe.

Look down into those waters below and see it, the thinnest thread scarcely visible, always changing with every wave, always in motion with the waters in which it lives, yet never losing its own essential form, sometimes widening and expanding with the swelling tides, sometimes closing up till it looks as if it never could recover its form again ; yet strong enough to weather many a storm and bring its full freight to shore. It is planned above by One Who knows the strength and weakness of the restless element into which it is to be cast ; it bears upon its whole system the mark of wisdom and skill ; it has a baffling and seemingly miraculous strength under the form of weakness ; it has an inexhaustible power of adapting itself to unceasing changes, it can recover itself and swing

[1] Rev. xvii. 15.

itself into shape into a moment. Its work is to enclose a multitude scattered far and wide, draw them together, and gently bring them to the shore, to that region whence the net came; and it would be impossible to conceive of anything better adapted to carry out this purpose. Yes, assuredly, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea.'

But, again. While the net is, to all appearance, the plaything of the waves, it is as a matter of fact held in the grasp of, and absolutely controlled by, One who stands upon the shore. See it as it is tossed about by the waves; they seem to do what they will with it, to bear it hither or thither as they please; to make or mar its shape and proportions; to all appearance its form and movement at any moment are the result of the action of the waters alone, they toss it hither and thither, expand or contract it, bear it out to sea or dash it in their fury shorewards. Now it is borne with a rush in one direction, and now, in the grasp of some mighty wave, its whole course is altered. But as we watch we see the wondrous yet simple plan by which every thread of that mazy net is controlled by the Mind of Him who holds it in His Hand. His Intelligence, His Will, His Purpose, moves it and governs it, and runs along every delicate fibre, in spite of all its free play in the waters. He knows when to relax His hold and when to draw it in; He knows how to avoid undue strain from the force of the current or the rush of the captives within the net. At the time when all the cords are most lax, and all its movements most free, His Hand gauges the strength of the pull, His Eye, His Mind is upon it

all. That vast network is but the Fisherman's Hand, its movements are the expression of His skill and purpose. The waters may have their way, but never so as to frustrate or hinder His Purpose.

So the whole organism of the Church, spreading like a network throughout the world, so influenced by all the currents of thought and tides of opinion that at times it appears to be but one of many human organisations, is nevertheless all ruled and controlled by the Mind and Hand of Him Who stands above the waterfloods, and Who understands, as we do not, at once His own Purpose and the conditions under which that Purpose is to be carried out. It is His design for drawing men out of the restless movements of time to the calm peace of the shore beyond. There is a quiet, steady pull upon all that vast network, enclosing a multitude which no man can number. Sometimes it is scarcely felt; at other times it is strong, definite, even alarming. The wind and the waves may beat with all their force, the currents may set out seaward with a strength that for the moment seems as if it must carry all away with it, but then the power of that firm grasp is felt vibrating throughout every part of the texture, and against all the opposing forces the net is drawn towards the shore. Those who are outside are not strong enough to bear up against the weight of the waters, and, after a moment's struggle, they are carried out into the depths. Then the strength and purpose of the net are seen and felt; those within are under the guidance and protection of a Hand that can save them from those relentless waters, and that

can bear them on against the full flood of the rushing tide.

Such is the Kingdom of Heaven ; a thing apparently no stronger than the threads of a net, but in reality strong enough to offer the most invincible resistance to all the forces and tendencies of the world, and carry its freight heavenward. The network of that Divine organisation lets the currents flow freely through, is itself borne with them and shaped by them to a certain extent ; it is sensitive to all the rush and movement around it, it swings and sways with them, but it is not controlled by them ; it is controlled by a power outside and above the waters ; it represents another mind and purpose, another tendency than that which the waters generate ; on the one hand to a certain extent dependent upon them, on the other hand altogether independent, for its movements are frequently in the opposite direction. Yet often it is only the observant eye that can detect any other force acting upon it than that of the waters ; the rush and commotion all about, the visible effect of the waves upon the net, every moment changing its appearance, is so great that the steady pull from the Hand upon the shore is scarcely felt. Indeed, many might argue at certain times that all the movement that they could feel or see might be accounted for by the action of the waves alone, and yet at other times a movement is detected that cannot be so accounted for. And thus, while every current of the seething waters acts upon the captives within the net, and often drives them violently against its yielding sides, it can drive them no further ; then they feel the pressure and the

restraint of their captivity, but also their safety. It is pleasant to swim with the tide ; it is unpleasant to feel the jerk that checks their easy movement ; but it is the only protection against being carried off into the depths of the sea ; for they need to be saved from themselves, from the tendencies of their own nature, as well as from the external forces that would carry them away.

And the one power amidst those blind and restless movements, which is able to resist them, and press on in spite of them steadily towards its end ; the one power which can be relied upon always to work towards the shore, towards the upper air, towards the higher world, is that fragile net cast into the sea, and held by Him who stands above the waters. That net floating amidst the waves, and tossed about so easily, betokens another world ; it is the only representative of a mind acting from without. A higher will, a more intelligent purpose than the battling waves know anything about, is lying there in the depths of the sea, sometimes passive, sometimes active, and each delicate thread is the channel along which that will and intelligence are borne. Whether the net lies slack and shifts with every heaving of the sea, or whether it strains and pulls, it is equally the act of the Mind of Him who holds it.

And yet, great as this heavenward force in the world is, how easily for the most part it bears its freight along. Those who are in the captivity of the net often do not know it ; it is only in a change of tide, or when strong currents set in, or as they draw near to the shore, that they are conscious of it at all.

Those within breathe the same element as those without, enjoy the same liberty, live the same life; they are scarcely conscious how wholly independent of the movement of the waters they are being borne shorewards; only they are safe from any sudden alarms or disturbance of their course. In this sense they are freer than those who, being outside, appear to live in a larger and less confined sphere; they are freer inasmuch as they have not to consider every change of tide, or every fresh current through which they pass; they feel the healthy movements of all such passing changes, but they are protected against their overpowering force or their treachery; they are affected but not controlled by them. These influences, which rule and guide the whole course and direction of those outside the net, do but modify the movements of those who are within; they are not indifferent to them, but they are not carried away by them, for they know that they are encompassed by a force that has all the strength of intelligence and will.

The organisation of the Church, the network that encloses those who are led by the Will and Purpose of God, does not rob its captives of their liberty, but protects them from harm; to the honest and good heart these restraints are no restraints; they are shut out from evil and shut in with God. The unrestrained life of the wide sea is not to them as true a liberty as that which keeps them, embraced by the wide sweep of the net, free from the fear of being carried away by some sudden move of the waters. The pressure and strain at times is indeed intense when they pass through dangerous and unforeseen currents, but that is not the normal

state. They are for the most part borne along under the guidance and gentle restraint of a power which ever more and more clearly reveals its purpose.

Such is the Kingdom of Heaven seen from above, as we look down upon it from this higher world where He who rules it lives. It is the organisation by which God works amidst the stormy passions of the world. It is the network in which He encloses all those whom He is drawing to the shores of Heaven. It is apparently weaker than most of the great institutions of earth, yet in truth it is stronger, and will outlive them all. Its strength and its perfection are only perceived fully when the conditions under which it rules are considered. It is not a compact kingdom, shut out from the world and calling its citizens to live apart from all earthly interests; it is open to every movement of the waters in which it floats, every tide sweeps freely through it; it is so framed that it is strong enough to preserve unchanged amidst storm and calm its own essential organisation, and yet to be affected by every changing current.

Such is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. What more vivid picture could be drawn of it than that drawn by the Hand of our Lord when He says, 'It is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea; which, when it was full, they drew to shore.'

The Labourers in the Vineyard

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market place, And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour, he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many are called, but few chosen.'—S. Matt. xx. 1–16.

VII

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

It would be impossible to conceive of a greater contrast than that which exists between the idea of life as represented in this Parable and as described at different times by S. Paul. S. Paul's images mostly depict life as full of activity, struggle, effort, intensity. The athlete in the race-course,[1] the combatant armed for battle.[2] He describes life as he knew it from his own experience. To a man of his ardour it must be intense. He puts his whole soul into all that he does ; his life is a constant struggle and it is always at high pressure. It is full of light and darkness. None could suffer as he and none could have such moments of intense joy. He feels keenly for all those for whom he has laboured ; rejoices with them and weeps with them. He pours out his soul in tender love towards those who have suffered for the Gospel and been faithful, and he weeps and breaks his heart over those who have been unfaithful. His arguments are again and again interrupted by strong outbursts of feeling.

Whether as Jew or Christian his life was lived at the very highest pressure ; he could not do things by halves. He throws all his influence and the power of his life first into the effort to stamp out Christianity,

[1] Cor. ix. 24. [2] Eph. vi. 13.

and then, when he has been convinced that he was wrong, into the effort to build it up. Truly his life was well represented under such images as he loved to use: 'I therefore so run not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.'[1] The recitation to the Corinthians of some of his experiences to show them the ground of his sympathy gives us a glimpse of what his life was: 'Five times received I forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often; in perils of waters; in perils of robbers; in perils by mine own countrymen; in perils of the heathen; in perils in the city; in perils in the wilderness; in perils in the sea; in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness; besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.'[2]

It was while he was in prison at Rome that his unwearied energy enabled him to write such Epistles as those to the Ephesians and Colossians. Nothing can daunt him. With his eye upon the goal, he presses towards the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And S. Paul represents a class of persons. There are many who, in their way, are like him. They must be up and doing. The world calls to them for what they have to give, and they must give it. Life to such men and women is no resting-place, but a field

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 26. [2] 2 Cor. xi. 24 *et seq.*

of constant activity and labour, the scene of keenest joys and bitterest griefs. They pass in quick succession from midday light to midnight darkness. Their minds are racked with disappointment and failure, or swept with the joyous delight of success and victory. All that they feel, they feel intensely. It is with them as in S. Paul's image of the racecourse, every nerve and muscle is strained—a slip is a hopeless failure—life is one rush forward to the goal to be lost or won.

What a complete and absolute contrast such imagery presents to that of the Parable drawn by a greater Hand than S. Paul's! 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an Householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard, and when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.'

An athlete in the racecourse, trained and keen, and a day labourer hired to work in a vineyard, beginning in the early morning and plodding on through the long monotonous hours of the day, watching the shadows change and lengthen, till the sun has passed from east to west! What a contrast!

The great world, with its vast interests and busy life, lies outside of his ken. He hears in the distance the hum of its life. He hears the quick and eager steps of some one coming, and passing on his way. He leans upon his spade and listens, but he is shut out from all the stirring scenes of that exciting life. What is going on in the wide world outside he knows not. From time to time a stranger enters the vine-

yard bringing in for the moment the breath of the outside world, and revealing a different tone of existence, and the labourer looks up from his work and wonders where this man comes from, and what strange life he leads, and then he stoops to his work again.

Here there is no pressure, no stimulating competition, no applauding crowd ; it would seem almost, no prize worth struggling for. All is still and hushed and sheltered. The quiet sounds of nature take the place of the noise and rush of life. The labourer has the field to himself, he can take it quietly, and do as much or as little as he pleases ; indeed, anything like speed and excitement would be out of place, it would be impossible for him. All the training of his nature is for quiet and leisurely movements. The day is long and the work is slow, and the labourer has caught from Nature her deliberate and measured ways. Spring time and autumn, summer and winter, they come in their due season and they cannot be hastened, and the labourer knows the signs of their approach, and he knows that he must wait their time, and so he will not hurry. His movements are in sympathy with the earth which he tills and the vine which he dresses ; it will take its time and so will he. Speed and haste would be out of place, would be useless in the sheltered quiet of the vineyard.

And outside, sometimes pushing its way up to the very vineyard gates, is the roar and rush of a noisy, struggling, fighting world, where life and death, success or failure, may depend upon one minute lost or gained. The labourer hears the noise of this life,

but he is shut out from it all; it has gone by him with a rush and left him far behind and forgot his existence in its eager struggle onward; he has nothing to do with it, he doesn't understand its ways or its meaning, he is the product of a wholly different environment. He would be lost or crushed in its boisterous and excited activities. To him the world is a place of quiet and routine, and ordered changes and regulated movements. He knows exactly what will happen each day, he can arrange every detail beforehand. He has never to prepare for the unexpected, he is never taken off his guard. No startling surprises break in upon the routine of his life to take him unawares. Morning after morning he goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.

The characteristics that are acquired by the conflict in the outside world would be of little avail here; indeed, most of the power that the athlete gains by training in the racecourse would not only be of no use, it would be a disadvantage. What could he do in the vineyard? He could not wait and plod, and go on day after day in a monotonous life sheltered from competition and struggle; his very gifts would be defects. The more he excelled in the other life the more he would fail in this. And the labourer's strength lies in qualities which would be defects in the athlete.

The athlete and the labourer—what a contrast they present in life and in character. The one the outcome of a long training in a life of conflict and pressure and excitement and change. The other in a life of routine and monotony. Each perfect in his

way, but each wholly unfit to do the other's work. The gifts which would most certainly ensure success in either involving necessary failure in the other. The one quick, alert, keen, eager, capable of enduring intense strain, self-possessed, able to keep his head in presence of an applauding crowd; with light, firm step, and his eye quick to see every movement around him and everything that can turn to his advantage. The other slow and regulated in his movements, easily put out by the occurrence of what is unexpected, wholly unfitted for noise and crowd and bustle and haste, under such circumstances simply pushed out of the way and passed by; but capable of any amount of plodding and endurance, able to wait through the long months of winter, till the first whisper of spring calls him forth to work again; putting his seed into the earth and then content to wait till the autumn to see the fruits of his labour. He has learnt that all hope of success depends upon his waiting upon Nature's slow movements and taking the opportunities she gives for work. He cannot order her, he can but accept what she gives. Many a day that he has meant to spend in work he has had to spend in waiting, prevented by rain or frost. There is a quiet self-restraint gained by all this constant yielding to another's ways, a patience and self-possession that never fail him. His slowness, and leisurely ways, and lack of fire are trying to the onlooker, but in the long run they are proved to be his strength, the earth and the sun and the growing trees and the budding flowers, and the measured tread of the seasons have taken this man into their

secrets and given him something of their character. He is as strong and patient and reliable as they.

And yet compare these two men together and who would not choose the athlete—all the advantages seem to be with him, all that most attracts and wins admiration. He is the perfect outcome of competition and energy, ready at every point for all life's emergencies and high endeavours. He cannot be overlooked in the crowd, or passed by, or forgotten, he is always to the front, always remarkable, always excelling, others have little chance in competition with him. Yet the world could not get on without the labourer. The athlete himself depends upon the labourer for his daily bread. Behind life's active scenes of strife and noise, the labourer goes on tilling the soil, sowing and reaping, planting and pruning the vine. He it is to whom all men turn for food. The labourer it is who by his quiet, steady, patient life keeps the world alive. The racecourse with all its excitement and its eager crowds could not exist unless the labourer in the quiet of the far-off vineyard will bend himself to his task.

It is necessary, therefore, that there should be both these lives, the world cannot get on without either; yet who would choose the dulness of the vineyard if he had the chance of the brilliant victories of the racecourse and the arena? No doubt the heart of many a labourer sickens at the monotony of his life and longs for more stirring scenes; yes, and perhaps many a tired wrestler envies him his more peaceful life.

There is one thing that keeps each in his place,

and gives to each life its true value and interpretation. Each has entered upon his life in obedience to a call from the same Person. It is not self-chosen. What holds each in his place is not merely taste or inclination, it is something far nobler and stronger. It is the power and influence of a Person, the recognition of His Call. It is the great principle of Vocation. The loyal and hearty surrender to the personal claim of Christ. He knows the world's needs and the men who under His training and the influences of His grace are best able to supply them. He calls whom He wills to the vineyard or to the arena. Sometimes we can see the natural fitness of the call, sometimes we cannot. He delights to effect by grace what the weakness of man's nature cannot attain to. Sometimes we see the man of ardent temperament sent into the vineyard, sometimes the man of a naturally quiet and retiring disposition sent into the arena. S. John, the son of Thunder, had the discipline of his hundred years of waiting. Jeremiah was forced into the thick of life's most stirring scenes. All S. Paul's life of activity and suffering was, as he tells us, a response to the call of Christ, 'I will send thee far hence to the Gentiles.'[1] He surrendered his life, with all its great gifts and energy, to the service of One whom he recognised as his Master. Leave out the Call of our Lord from the life of S. Paul, and it has no meaning. He was not spreading a cause, he was serving a Person. The name by which he delighted to call himself was 'Paul, the slave of Jesus Christ.'[2] As an old man, writing to the Galatians,

[1] Acts xxii. 21. [2] Rom. i. 1; Gal. i. 10; Titus i. 1.

he points to the scars and wounds with which his body was covered, and he calls them 'the marks of the Lord Jesus.'[1] They are the brand marks of his servitude. His body is stamped with his Master's name. Such is S. Paul's own interpretation of a life which, for activity and excitement of events, has never been surpassed.

All he is doing has in his own words but one meaning and object: 'This one thing I do, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'[2]

And the labourer, too, in the Parable entered the vineyard at the call of the Householder, 'Go work today in My vineyard.' It was as truly his vocation as the more stirring life was the vocation of the other.

He who called each knew better than they knew themselves, both the men who were called and the work to which He called them. 'He went out to hire labourers into His vineyard:' it was no accident. He knew the men and what they needed. The racecourse has its dangers, and so has the vineyard. And there is but one power which can protect men from the dangers of each, and that is the constant realisation of the Call which has led each to his own place.

How can the labourer stand out against the demoralising effects of his surroundings? How can he keep up heart or interest amidst the same round of work day by day, the same deadening routine? How can he help becoming heavy, mechanical,

[1] Gal. vi. 17. [2] Phil. iii. 14.

stupid? How can he amidst such surroundings develop any largeness of heart, inspiration, enthusiasm? Many a man struggles against such influences for a time and then sinks crushed beneath them. The deadening weight of mechanical labour works out all heart and interest and aspiration, till the mind becomes stupid and the heart dead.

There is but one means by which the heart can be preserved fresh and young and the will firm and buoyant, and that is by bringing into all this stifling routine the inspiring presence of a Person. Let the labourer work under the Eye of Him who has called him, let him live in constant fellowship with One whose Presence is always an inspiration, and who is more interested in the worker than the work, and all will be changed. The companionship of a great and much-loved Person dispels all monotony and gives interest to the most commonplace acts. The heart may get chilled and deadened if it has only to deal with things; it cannot if it has to deal with a Person whom it loves. In such a relationship there is an inexhaustible store of interest and vigour and power of expansion. The personal companionship inspires the most mechanical work with interest. The meanest and most sordid surroundings become transformed by a well-loved presence. Let a man be ever so crushed and chilled by the dead monotony of a changeless routine of mechanical work, let him to all appearance have himself become but a part of the machinery he is working, nevertheless if a Person be introduced into the midst of this chilling round of work, a Person who can touch his heart, how quickly all is changed; the

fire begins to kindle within that transforms all the appearance of things:

> 'Beneath the veriest ash there hides a spark of soul
> Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the whole
> O' the grey, and free again, be fire; of worth the same,
> Howe'er produced, for, great or little, flame is flame.'

And this is precisely where the labourers who were first called failed. They settled down to their work for their pay. They did work more than any of the others and endured more fatigue. All that they said of themselves was true. The work was done, but they themselves deteriorated. Their work had just that effect upon them which was most to be deprecated. It produced just those defects in character which it tends to produce. They became wholly out of sympathy with their Master who had called them. They cared nothing for His interests, but only for their own. They looked with jealous criticism on every new worker who entered the vineyard. They did not care for their Master's work being done, all was measured by its effect upon themselves.

We see in the labourers that were called early in the morning all the characteristic faults of the narrowing and mechanical influences in which their lot was cast. They had not the faults of the athlete, but they had all the faults of the labourer. They were workmen hired to get through a certain amount of work, and nothing more. They had the virtues which regular work tends to develop and they had the vices, and they had nothing more. They were the creatures of circumstances, they had not found

any power to counteract the evil effect of circumstances. And thus they wholly and completely failed of the purpose for which they were called. That purpose was not to get through a certain amount of work, but to develop a certain character and to resist certain evil tendencies. The circumstances of their life played upon them to the full, and produced its natural results of good and evil. A man is not to be praised because he has not the vices which belong to another temperament and other circumstances, nor because life has developed in him certain good habits almost unconsciously to himself. But he is to be praised who has found the remedy for the evil effects which his surroundings tend to produce; who can live the most circumscribed life and not get narrow, who can go through the same routine of work day after day and not become mechanical. And what is the remedy, but the constant recollection of the personal call and the personal relationship. In the memory of that call is life and vigour, freshness and interest, daily renewal, perennial youth. Every day's work is the weaving of a closer and more intimate friendship between the labourer and the householder. What is work, what is time when all is hallowed by the charm of an ever-closer fellowship with one most worthy of our affection; the hands will never weary if the heart is warm and cheered. If the heart be quickened with life the whole nature is alive, and the whole man is growing, outgrowing the narrow limits to which his body is confined.

But this the labourers had not found, they had

failed to find the true protection against their dangers, the true inspiration for their work. They had worked themselves till all heart had died in them. Their failure was typical. It was complete. Of failure such as our Lord would warn us against, the instance is absolute. These men became what any labourer would naturally become, and wholly failed to use the remedy He provided. They got what they worked for and nothing more: 'Take that thine is and go thy way.'

Life gained for them what they bargained for, and ended in a separation from Him for whom they worked. A separation which was, indeed, inevitable, inasmuch as life never taught them its one invaluable lesson, to know Him who had called them to work for Him.

The Two Sons

THE TWO SONS

'A certain man had two sons ; and he came to the first and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not : but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir : and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not : but the publicans and the harlots believed him : and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.'—S. Matt. xxi. 28–32.

VIII

THE TWO SONS

THERE are to be found all over Christendom a number of men and women whom it is difficult to classify. They are to all appearance neither positively on the side of Christ, nor actively against Him; they are certainly not religous, but neither are they definitely irreligious. I think if we were to analyse their position we should find that their spiritual life had never yet awakened into action. They have not rejected God, for they have not yet consciously heard His Voice. How many live thus, with a certain amount of religion that has been traditional. They have been brought up to say their prayers and to go to church, and from time to time to go to the Sacraments; they have accepted what they were taught in childhood, they have no doubts, no perplexities, for doubts and perplexities imply at least that the mind has awakened to the importance of religious questions. And thus while they are by no means irreligious, still less opposed to religion, they are certainly not *religious*. Religion has no real influence upon their lives, they are in no sense controlled or influenced by the Will of God, nor has it ever occurred to them that God has any special purpose for them in life. They are like those described in the Parable as standing all the day idle because no

man has hired them. They have not hired themselves out to the powers of evil, nor have they yet heard the voice of the Householder calling them to work for Him, and so, as far as religion is concerned, they are neither for nor against it. What religion they have costs them nothing, they have never made a sacrifice for it in their lives, it has never put them to any trouble either in thought or action.

Such are a vast number of people, neither bad nor good, with no very harrowing sense of the need of God, no power of prayer, no effort to rise up to the supernatural, no real knowledge of the supernatural to haunt them with a consciousness of their own narrowness or the incompleteness of their lives.

Now to most people living in this way there comes the time when our Lord claims them. There breaks in upon this life of nature the Call of God—the awakening Call—bringing with it, if but for a moment, the vivid realisation of His Personal being and claim upon them. He who gave them life, demands that it be used in His service—'Go work in My vineyard.'

There are strange events in the life of most of us, things that make people pause and think, things that raise questionings in the mind; and many of them can be explained, and others are incapable of being explained. But when this call comes there is no doubt, no possibility of explaining away, except by a process of self-deception. The man who hears that Voice, however it comes, is certain of two things—that there is a God, and that He has called him in

some way to work for and to serve Him. What that work is, or how it is to be done, is another question, but that he has been called by God to come out of that listless life and live more seriously he has no doubt. For the moment the soul has been awakened to the reality of life, to the awful reality of God's personal being, it has been awakened as really as one is awakened out of sleep by the voice of one calling, and the passage is as vivid as the passage from dreamland to waking. It is a supreme moment, everything depends upon what he who has heard that awakening Voice will do. He certainly can never be the same again. A man may go on for years unawakened, but when once he has been stirred and roused, and has felt something of the claim of God, and then turns back to the old negative life of nature, he finds that he can't live in it as he was before, he deteriorates, he does wrong things which he formerly was not tempted to. For that act of turning away is a resistance of God, an act of rebellion. He then sets his will against the Will of God in a way in which he never consciously had done it before, and he becomes defiant. He knows what he ought to do, and he deliberately refuses to do it, and then refusing to rise to God's standard he finds himself unable to keep to his own.

Now there are no doubt many men who at once surrender themselves to the claim of God when it comes thus clearly and strongly into their lives, and there are doubtless others who at once reject it. S. Paul says he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.[1] S. Matthew describes his own surrender in

[1] Acts xxvi. 19.

words of touching simplicity: 'As Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose and followed Him.'[1] That was S. Matthew's awakening and surrender to the claim of God. On the other hand, the young ruler, when he awoke to God's claim upon him in all its fulness, went away sad at what he was called upon to do.[2] We are left in uncertainty as to whether he ever afterwards obeyed the call or not.

But the majority of people are not so prompt either in obeying or rejecting the call of God when they first hear it. There are many middle courses. Multitudes of bypaths can be found between a direct act of surrender and a direct act of rebellion. In these middle ways many torture themselves. Not a few lose themselves. The claims of the old easy life are great, and the call of God always makes life look stern. When it breaks in upon the soul with all its awakening power, the will not unfrequently refuses to rise to the demands of God, and yet it shrinks from a deliberate act of rebellion, and so it hesitates and holds aloof from any direct course. And the consequence is often a life of compromise, in which neither the enjoyment of the old life nor the peace of the surrender to God is attained, but there is a torturing of conscience and a sacrifice of the full measure of the rewards of both worlds.

Now in the Parable under consideration our Lord describes for us two typical classes of persons represented by the Two Sons, as they hear the Voice of God

[1] S. Matt. ix. 9. [2] *Ibid.* xix. 22.

their Father calling them to come out from the idle life of worldliness, a life at least in which the highest powers of their nature have no capacity for full development, into a life of direct service to Him: 'Son, go work to-day in My vineyard.' He claims them as His sons, and He asserts His right to demand their service. They meet the call neither by direct obedience nor direct disobedience; the son who obeyed answered his father's command by saying at first that he would not obey, and the son who disobeyed answered his father promptly, 'I go, sir.'

The call brought out in each a certain side of the character which was not the most real or the strongest. In each case there was a prompt response to the call, which was at least in a measure superficial; it was not the final answer of the *will*, but an answer of a part of their nature. It was, in a word, the answer of inclination rather than of the ultimate resolution of the will, and therefore it was not the answer of the *self*, as the event proved. Yet if either had been asked when they made, each of them, his answer, whether he really intended to do as he had said, he would not have hesitated in answering, 'Certainly, I have no intention or desire to do otherwise than I have said.' They did not really know themselves. The call came to them, and it proved, as such calls always do prove, a means of revealing them to themselves. To the one it disclosed a nature with strong inclinations to rebel against God's interference in his life. The whole surface was swept and stirred by currents running counter to the Will of God, but in fact it was

ultimately ruled and controlled by a will which, when brought face to face with God's call, was not prepared deliberately to disobey.

To the other it disclosed a nature with good intentions but with a will that was not strong enough to correspond with the Will of God. The natural inclinations and the superficial desires were excellent, but there was a fundamental weakness of character in the face of difficulties.

Each of these men would have judged himself as being different from what he really was, and indeed at first so would others. The one was to all appearances very much worse than he proved himself to be, the other very much better. And Christ, as always, entered into their lives to sift and prove and judge them. 'This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'[1] The coming of Christ into the life separates the wise from the foolish, the strong from the weak, the good from the bad.

It is an interesting fact, and yet intensely true to nature, that the first result of this call is not the final result, it does not manifest the real character, but the more superficial side. It does not, in fact, bring out the depths of the character, but the natural inclinations, and these are not any real test of character at all. The worst men in the world have often been men with good intuitions, but wholly ruled by inclination, feeling, desire, and the evil inclinations have eventually proved the stronger, and in the end have gained complete control, leaving the better inclinations to live on

[1] S. Luke ii. 34, 35.

merely in the form of feeble and unfulfilled resolutions, proving a fruitful source of self-deception.

On the other hand, some of the holiest men have had strong passions and the very worst tendencies to fight against; but the will has chosen and clung to what is good, and eventually, when they came to know Him, to God, and has fought its way upward against these strong tides and currents that seemed often as if they must swamp it.

Now when some very strong demand is put upon such men, appealing to all that is highest within them, it is natural, it is necessary, that the first response should be the answer of inclination, not of will.

The call of God comes to a man struggling with himself, battling with passions that seem ever ready to overcome him, conscious only of how strong the evil tendencies of his nature are, and of what a rare thing a complete victory is. To such a man the call of God comes, 'Go work in My vineyard,' a call to something vastly higher than he has ever before imagined, to a life of personal service to God; and nature, exhausted and despairing, answers at once, 'I will not.' That is the answer that springs at once to his lips, prompted by a nature that knows more of its failures than of its successes, of the evil that is in it than of the good. But it was the answer of the surface, not of the depths of his being—of inclination, not of the will; that came later. When the inclination and the evil tendencies had had their say, the question came back to the will, and the response of the will was true. There was a revulsion of feeling, the will stemmed the tide of inclination and carried

the whole self with it, 'afterward he repented and went.'

The conflict between the two sides of the man is brought out by the call of God ; one side says, 'I will not,' the other says, 'I will,' and the victory is shown by the event, and by nothing else—he went. That is the one point upon which our Lord laid stress, 'Whether of them twain *did* the will of His Father ?' It does not affect the value of the action that he did not want to go, that his obedience was the result of a struggle. Our Lord appeals to the onlookers, to those who are the witnesses of this interior strife. Anyone can see, the true response was the response of the will.

Yes, those who stood by and listened to our Lord's graphic description of the conflict which many of them must have at some time or other experienced in their own hearts, perhaps were even then experiencing under the stimulating influence of His Presence, gave unhesitatingly the right judgment, yet it is not so easy to see the obvious truth of the answer when the struggle is actually raging within ourselves.

Which of us can ? Which of us has not felt that the strength of the inner opposition marred, if it did not destroy, the value of the act. When you are called upon to do some difficult thing, to make some real sacrifice, and all the strength of natural inclinations is against it, and the answer to the command of God comes quickly from many parts of your nature, 'I will not,' how hard it is to feel that the only matter of real importance is, whether, in the teeth of all this storm, the will obeys, 'whether of them twain *did* the

will of his Father.' Indeed, so far from mitigating the value of the act, it is very much enhanced by the fact of all the opposition presented to the will, for the will endures a severe test and triumphs :

> 'For I am 'ware it is the seed of act
> God holds appraising in His hollow palm ;
> Not act grown great thence in the world below,
> Leafage and branchage vulgar eyes admire.'

Yet if we could realise this in the time when a command of God brings out the conflict it would be a great encouragement.

It does not matter that you do not *want* to do that difficult work, that you do not *like* to say your prayers at any given time, that you do not *want* to do that unselfish act. You cannot help that ; the question, the only question is, will you *do* it in spite of all this inner opposition ? May we not say with reverence that our Lord did not *want* to drink the cup of His agony in Gethsemane, He shrank from it so much that He prayed that if it were possible it might pass from Him. But He did not turn away, amidst all the terror and shrinking of nature, the will never swerved from the Will of God.

And if the answer of the first son is full of encouragement, the answer of the second is no less full of warning. For here again the conflict is clearly seen and the two answers are heard, only it is all the reverse of the former. This man had excellent intentions, he was attracted by what was good and noble, his imagination was easily appealed to by visions and dreams of sacrifice and service. All that was good, indeed, appealed so strongly to his imagination and

emotions, that he probably never realised how little they affected his life. But life does not consist in beautiful dreams, or lofty ideals, but in action, in the effort to fulfil such ideals. It was easy to stir this man's feeling, but very difficult indeed to move his will. His intentions and inclinations were so far in advance of his actions, that it would have been perhaps difficult for him to perceive what a bad man he really was.

And the call of God shows these two sides, the conflict and the result.

No sooner did he receive the call to a life of service to God than all the best inclinations of his nature were aroused, and answered with a hundred voices, 'I go, sir.' There was a movement, a stir, a sympathetic thrill in response. But the call involved a specific act, a giving up of one kind of life and an entering upon another; the will must rise and move—but it remained inactive. Down below from the depths of the nature comes a voice unheard amidst the chorus of eager response, and it answers doggedly, 'I will not go.' But the whole surface of the nature is in such a flurry of excitement that this answer is unheeded. Yet it is the answer of the will, and when all the eager voices above have worn themselves out, it quietly carries the day. 'He went not.'

The value of a good act of obedience is not depreciated by any amount of opposition within the soul, nor is the evil of an act of disobedience one whit lessened by the fact of the best intentions in the world. Beneath a fierce antagonism from a hundred evil inclinations the will may press forward and do what

it has been bidden, and triumph. And beneath a surface all responsive and eager in its delight in what is good, the will may doggedly refuse to stir, nay, may turn its face hellwards, and fail.

Such is the encouragement and the warning of the Parable, and in its historical setting the warning is stern. The Jew had ever been making 'his boast of God, that he knew His Will, and approved the things that are more excellent, and was confident that he himself was a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and of truth in the law.'[1] At the call of God he was ever saying, 'I go, sir.' Yet he went not. The publicans and harlots felt their sinfulness, they could not, dared not, lift up so much as their eyes to heaven, yet when the call came, and the Voice of God was heard bidding them rise and work for Him, though many evil passions and long-indulged habits of sin held them back and cried out, 'I will not go,' in bitter penitence and with many an agonising struggle they rose and went, and entered into the Kingdom of Heaven, while the Scribes and Pharisees were shut out.

[1] Rom. ii. 18, 19, 20.

The Great Supper
AND
The Marriage of the King's Son

THE GREAT SUPPER, AND THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON

'Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servants at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee, have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.'—S. Luke xiv. 16–24.

'And Jesus answered, and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding. and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways,

one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.'—S. Matt. xxii. 1–14.

IX

THE GREAT SUPPER, AND THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON

THESE two Parables, though in many respects closely resembling one another, and by a few commentators considered as different recensions of the same discourse, yet seem clearly to be quite distinct. They belong to different epochs of our Lord's ministry. The Parable of the Great Supper was spoken at a much earlier period, when the position of decided antagonism had not yet been assumed by the Pharisees. Indeed, their opposition was so far from having reached the acute stage to which it attained later, that the Parable was spoken while our Lord sat at meat in the house of one of the chief of the body.

The Parable of the Marriage Feast, on the other hand, was given in the Temple court on the Tuesday before His Passion, when the final plan of the Pharisees was matured by which they meant to compass His death. At the time when the former Parable was spoken there was still the hope and the possibility that the chiefs of the nation might yet be won to His allegiance, their iniquity was not yet fulfilled, nor their rejection sealed. But when the later Parable was uttered, all such hope had long since ended, they had had their chance, and rejected

it, their hatred to Christ could now be satisfied with nothing short of His death.

We see clearly the evidences of the altered condition of things in the substance of the two Parables. The latter is far more severe. The refusal of the guests to accept the invitation is wanting in the outward courtesy displayed in the former Parable, 'they made light of it, and went their ways, and the remnant took His servants and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.' Moreover, the wrath of the King in this Parable is manifested more terribly: in the former He sent His messengers to call others, saying, 'that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of My Supper,' but in the latter, 'He sent forth His armies and destroyed those murderers and burnt up their cities.'

In this Parable, too, the Messianic claim is brought out more strongly. The giver of the feast is no longer 'a certain man' but 'a king,' and the occasion is not, as in S. Luke's Parable, 'a supper,' but the Marriage of the King's Son. To those brought up amidst all the Messianic hopes and traditions of the Jews, such details would not pass unnoticed, and the import of the change of imagery in the later Parable could scarcely have been misunderstood.

The episode at the close of the latter of the two Parables is not to be considered therefore as another detail added by S. Matthew to S. Luke's Parable, but the two Parables must be regarded as altogether distinct. We cannot fail to see in the Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son the final rejection of the

Jews and the call of the Gentiles, even the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. 'He sent forth His armies and destroyed those murderers and burnt up their city.' The utmost that is threatened in S. Luke's Parable is, 'that God, turning from one portion of the Jewish people, from the Priests and Pharisees, would offer the privileges which they despised to another portion of the same nation, the people that knew not the law, the publicans and harlots, with only the slightest intimation of the call of the Gentiles; while here (in S. Matthew) the forfeiture of the kingdom by the whole Jewish people, who, with fewer exceptions, had proved themselves unworthy of it, is foretold.' But while it is right and proper to keep the two Parables each in its proper place, historically and exegetically as regards their immediate interpretation, and the circumstances under which they were spoken, it will not be amiss in considering them spiritually, and in their practical application, to take them together.

They describe for us then a supreme moment in the life of the soul. It is the moment in which it is forced to decide whether it will draw nearer to God in more intimate and devout relationship to Him or break with Him altogether. 'They that were bidden were called.' Their names had already been enrolled amongst the invited guests; that had taken place some time before. Now the messengers are sent to say, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' That first bidding to the wedding, or call to the feast—the choice and selection of the guests by God—was a greater reality and fraught with graver

consequences than they were at all prepared for. To Him who gave the feast and selected the guests it meant a close and intimate relationship with those whom He had invited. All were not bidden, out of a great multitude there were comparatively but a few who were so highly honoured. And now the moment has come when the messengers are sent to summon the selected guests. 'Come, for all things are now ready.' He who had chosen them out of all the world, calls them and claims them—'the time has arrived, come.'

It is an easy thing to pledge oneself for the future, to enter into obligations that do not interfere with one's plans at the moment. It is easy to accept even with pleasure the invitation that does not pledge one to any immediate step, or involve any immediate responsibilities. Men accept such indefinite invitations readily, and often give them no further thought. They are bidden to the wedding, and their names are enrolled amongst the invited guests, and they go their way, and are interested and absorbed in the many calls of the present; and as time goes on, it may be they wholly forget the invitation and their pledge.

But it is not so with the Giver of the feast, to Him the selection and invitation of the guests has been a personal matter. He has chosen each one by name, the place is prepared for each separate guest that has been invited, and He cannot forget their promise, nor can He fail to send his servant at supper time to call them to fulfil their engagement. The invitation on His part involved and necessitated the reminder, 'Come.' If He did not call them at the moment when the feast was prepared the first bid-

ding would have been worse than meaningless. If the guests refuse to come, they cannot remain on the former terms with the Giver of the Feast; they have, as a matter of fact, been guilty of a gross insult, they can be His friends no longer

The call, then, and the reminder of their promise was a supreme moment to the bidden guests, they must go to the feast or they must break with their king. They can no longer remain as they have been hitherto, they must enter into more intimate relations with Him, or all friendship must come to an end. They have, as a matter of fact, gone too far to remain upon their former easy terms. The invitation to the feast has been an act of gracious condescension on His part, the acceptance of the invitation has been an act of responsibility upon their part which necessitates a certain closer and more intimate association between them than heretofore, or an open rupture. To refuse to obey the summons to the feast is to offer Him an insult which makes further friendship with Him impossible. Many of them looking forward to the Feast in the far future, as a thing that was not likely to interfere in any way with their present lives and interests, may have echoed the platitude of the guest who sat at the board with our Lord in the Pharisee's house, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.' It seemed in the far distance a blessed thing no doubt. It was a pleasant prospect to have in the background of their lives to which they could turn and of which they could think as a counterpoise to the world's disappointments. But it is a different matter when the call to eat bread in the

Kingdom of God breaks in upon all the excitements and interests of a very real and entrancing present.

Yet the bidding to the Feast necessitated the call to come when it was ready, and the King would have been untrue to Himself and unfaithful to his guests had He not reminded them.

The invitation, then, involved the creation of a situation which sooner or later must lead to a crisis. Every one of those who were bidden must sit down to the great Feast with their King or they must break with Him for ever. They must enter upon terms of closer intimacy or they must be—not as though they had never known Him, far worse than that—they must be henceforth His enemies.

The Parables describe this crisis in the lives of these men. When the call comes they refuse to fulfil their engagements; 'they all with one consent began to make excuse;' 'they made light of it and went their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise, and the remnant took his servants and entreated them spitefully and slew them.' They saw clearly as time went on all that their refusal implied: at first it was couched in the most courteous terms, but in the later Parable the position is more clearly grasped; if they will not come they can no longer remain friends, or even subjects of the King, they break into open rebellion and entreat the servants spitefully and slay them.

All this is a graphic picture of what we are constantly witnessing, perhaps of what some of us may be experiencing. The position in which the Christian is placed by Baptism, resembles that of the bidden guests. It is an initial state, it is not final.

It is the enrolling of the names of those who have been chosen by God to enter into the closest and most intimate relation with Himself. All, in the mystery of God's wisdom are not called to this state of high privilege, He calls those whom in His love He wills. Each of those who are so called is the object of His special solicitude. Why He should call one and not another we cannot tell. But the first call to Baptism involves other calls. Those who enter into the Christian state and are then enrolled amongst the selected and invited guests to partake of His bounties, and to be on terms of holy friendship with Him, must expect that He will assert His claim upon them, remind them of their pledges, and demand of them something worthy of their calling. 'I call you not servants, but I have called you friends.'[1] Such is His language to those whom He has selected out of the world to draw near in a special way to Himself.

Now this call to enter upon all that the Baptism covenant involves comes to some sooner, to others later, but it surely comes one day to all. 'He sent His servant to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready.' If it did not come it would involve an unfaithfulness on the part of our Lord. He is pledged to call us into an ever more and more intimate communion with Himself. And this, and this only, is the true meaning of whatever call at any time we may receive. He bids us do something, that in the doing it we may get to know Him better. He commands us to give up something that He may Himself take its place. He sends His servant to warn us that the hour is come, that we can no longer remain

[1] S. John xv. 15.

as we are, that we must come to the Feast of His love and self-revelation.

The very position of the Christian, as one called to exceptional privileges such as are not granted to all mankind, ought to prepare him for these calls, these reminders that he is pledged to something more; and yet when they do come, how unexpected they are, they take him by surprise, he is not prepared for them or ready to obey them! The callbreaks in upon all the interests and events and ties of life: 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it.' 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them.' 'I have married a wife.' The messenger of Christ comes as an intruder in the midst of such interests and complications—one man just settling down as a landed proprietor, another forming the gentle ties of domestic life—and calls them away to wholly different scenes and interests, reminds them of pledges long ago made and obligations entered into. The Master saith, 'Come, for all things are ready.'

To such a call there can be but one of two answers. Those to whom it comes must either obey it, rise, leave all, and follow whither they are called, or they must refuse to obey, refuse, that is, to carry out the engagements which their whole privileged condition as Christians pledges them to, and consequently make an open breach with our Lord, a breach which, as we have seen, ends in active antagonism and rebellion.

It is the advent of such calls breaking in upon all the activities and pressing interests of life that tests what manner of men these bidden guests are, whether they have forgotten all about that relationship which they have formed with Christ, and settled down into a

life of earthliness, or whether all the things of time take a secondary place in their life, and the invitation of our Lord is paramount.

The call comes and sifts them through and through. It shows them to themselves and to others—it lays them bare to the eye of scrutiny. It is their treatment of the invitation when it comes that shows better than the fairest words or the most sacred promises what manner of men they are. But more than this, the refusal to obey the call and to keep true to the promises already made lead again and again to a final, often to an open rupture with our Lord. Those who will not go forward go backward, they close their hearts against Him from whom they have already averted their wills. The easy relationship of the past can no longer be continued; they had not disobeyed before, they had lived true to their standard, though it may not have been a very high one, but now they are in revolt, they disobey a distinct reminder of forgotten pledges, and forthwith their spiritual life begins to deteriorate, and those who have been called to a close and intimate friendship with Christ not uncommonly are in open rebellion against Him, 'and take His servants and entreat them spitefully and slay them;' others enter and take the places of those who refuse to obey, and the door is shut. The chance is lost for ever.

But what of those who do not reject such calls. Are all such safe? Is there such a thing possible as that men should outwardly keep on terms of obedience, and pass through life without any apparent breach with Christ and in apparent obedience to His many calls, and yet not be permitted to enter into the

joy of that union and intimacy with Him which the Marriage Feast is meant to typify.

The closing scene of the later Parable warns us that this is possible. If the two Parables together, in that which they have in common, reveal to us the open rupture between the soul and God in this life, and the cause and occasion of the rupture, this tells us that it is possible to go through life without any such open rupture, and yet to be finally rejected.

It is possible, so this Parable would teach us, to obey God's calls to enter upon the various privileges and blessings to which such calls invite us, and yet to do so in such a spirit that it separates us from the Person who calls us. To be called to a special nearness to God in His service, and not to realise Him whom we serve, is to beget a spirit of irreverence that ends in an alienation from Him more complete even than that which comes from open rebellion. Amongst those who entered into the Marriage Feast there was but one rejected—one type of man. In the person of that one man there may be represented many or few, it matters not, the cause of rejection is the same for all. They live on to the end in God's service, but the character of their lives leads them to a daring and irreverent familiarity, a complete absence of holy fear or of the sense of sin, or of the need of the garment of grace. Though this man in the Parable saw all the guests clad in the wedding garment, he believed he could pass muster, he considered that his own garments were good enough, he should not be rejected. And in this spirit he pushes into the very Presence of the King. Such was the effect of a life of outward obedience and apparent nearness to God upon a man

who did not inwardly rise up to correspond with the external privileges of his position. Ever near Him in body but not in heart, he became familiar, and familiarity bred contempt.

'What is commoner than this self-complacency, this utter blindness to the fact that God is holy, and that holiness must therefore be the rule everywhere? What is commoner than the feeling that we are well enough, that we shall somehow pass muster, that as we mean to take our places amongst the heavenly guests we shall surely not be ejected? How hard it is for any of us fully to grasp the radical nature of the inward change that is required if we are to be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. No mere appearance of accepting His invitation, no associating of yourself with those who love Him, no outward entrance into His presence, no making use of the right language, is anything to the purpose: what is wanted is a profound sympathy with God, a real delight in what is holy, a radical acceptance of His will; in other words, a state of mind in you which God can delight in and approve of, and hold fellowship with. There is no real acceptance of the invitation, no abiding entrance into God's favour where there is no growing likeness to God; without this it is mere word and self-deception. "Know ye not that the unjust shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."'[1]

[1] *Parables of our Lord.* Marcus Dods.

The Ten Virgins

THE TEN VIRGINS

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them : but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came : and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage : and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.'—S. Matt. xxv. 1–13.

X

THE TEN VIRGINS

THE Parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents were spoken by our Lord on the same occasion, as He sat upon the Mount of Olives with the disciples a few days before His death, and they form a striking contrast, representing as they do the same thing, the Kingdom of Heaven, yet possessing not one single feature in common.

The Talents bring us into the market-place, amidst the most active and exciting scenes of life. It is the place where the strain and pressure, which are to be met with indeed everywhere, are most keenly felt, most vividly seen. The struggle for life is at its highest point. There is no room there for anyone who is not wide awake and on the alert; should there be any such, another instantly presses forward and takes his place. Those who enter the market-place enter upon a contest in which all the powers of mind and body are taxed to the uttermost, and quickened. We know the characteristics that are developed there—shrewdness, alertness, industry, practical capacity. Those who can make their five talents produce five talents more, must be men of energy and promptness, men who can take all in at a glance and put all to immediate profit, anticipating every emergency, ready and masterful. A moment's hesitation or indecision and

they may fail of putting their master's trust to the best account. All the characteristics of the men who get on in the market-place, and who consequently received their Master's approval, are those which belong to the most active condition of life, those which make their possessors successful men of business, men of the world. And it is well to note that the men who did get on, and consequently who must have possessed or acquired these gifts, were those who were greeted by their Master with the words of approval, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' The only one who received a stern and awful rebuke was the man whom we might characterise as being in the market-place, yet not of the market-place. Who, though sent into the market-place to develop his talent, was lacking in all the push and energy and quickness necessary to get on there, and was, instead of being practical, an idle dreamer.

It seems a strange place and a strange image to choose to represent the 'Kingdom of Heaven,' the life and work of a Christian, yet the picture is drawn by the Hand of our Lord.

Then we turn to the other Parable, the Parable of the Virgins, and all is changed. The Virgins, with their lamps alight, are slumbering while they wait for the call that is to waken them to meet the Bridegroom. Here all is stillness, silence, repose. What a contrast to the rush and turmoil of the market-place! There is no conflict, no straining, no active work even; no need for any of those characteristics without which life in the market-place would be impossible. Such gifts would be useless here, worse, they would be out

of place. The shrewd man of business, full of energy and activity, would be intolerable in the quiet stillness of that dreamy night. These Virgins must wait, the workers in the market-place must act. The more patient they are in waiting, the fitter they are for their place. They have but to keep their lamps alight and tarry till the Bridegroom come. They cannot hasten his coming by one moment, the time rests with Him, not with them. They cannot go into the market-place if they would, their business is to wait that they may be ready when He comes, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the morning. There is no work that they could offer to Him that would atone for their not being in their place to greet Him at the moment that He comes. The chief characteristics of the Virgins therefore which best fit them to fulfil their office in life are patience, quiet endurance, inaction without sloth, a power of waiting without getting restless or losing interest. Outwardly a silent stillness and passivity, inwardly a keen watchful interest and alertness. Strange contrast in all—in life, in character, and in judgment. In the one case the servant is judged and condemned because he did not work; in the other, the Virgins are condemned because they did not watch. There seems at first sight to be no point of contact in these two pictures of the Kingdom of Heaven, all that strikes us is the completeness of the contrast.

1. We may consider them first, then, as a contrast, representing two different types of life, lives that are markedly different in their characteristics, even in the eyes of men. There are, we know, many different kinds of vocation. It is not a matter of liking, or

of choice, or of natural disposition, that is to decide our place in life, it is a divine call. 'As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.'[1] That life is most perfect which most perfectly corresponds to God's will, and God has a Will, a Purpose for each separate soul.

But amidst the multitude of vocations there have always been in the Christian Church two forms of vocation more or less marked. In their most distinct forms they are the active and the contemplative, the life of work and the life of prayer. We find them represented amongst the Apostles in the persons of S. Peter and S. John, and amongst the disciples of our Lord in Martha and Mary. We read of one to whom our Lord said, 'Go, and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and come and follow Me,'[2] and of another to whom He said, 'Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.'[3]

But these same forms of life are to be met with in a more or less marked degree everywhere throughout Christendom: those whom circumstances call out to action and service, and those who in the providence of God are more or less removed from the spheres of active work; sometimes through ill-health or the accidental ordering of their lives, sometimes through a more direct call from God. There are not wanting in every age of the Church those who, some in accordance with, some directly against, their natural dispositions, are led more and more to draw themselves away from outward things, and to find their only power of self-protection and of growth in the life of

[1] Cor. vii. 17. [2] S. Matt. xix. 21. [3] S. Mark v. 19.

prayer. In such matters none can judge of another as to the question of a higher or lower form of life; that life is the highest for each to which God calls each, it is not a matter of choice. None can find their sanctification in either form of life, if it be entered upon merely from taste or inclination. God calls whom He wills, and we find each form of life in the most unexpected places and under the most unlikely circumstances.

The two types of life, then, we see figured in these two Parables.

The servants to whom the Talents were given were commanded to go out into the world and develop them. It is as though our Lord said to them, 'It matters little where you may happen to be, outwardly your life may have to be lived in the money market, it matters not, so long as, wherever you are, you remember that the Talents which I have entrusted to you are Mine.' The secret meaning and the interpretation of those crowded, active, busy Christian lives, that which enables those who are living such lives not to get swamped and carried away by the tide, is the constant watchfulness over the motive. He who can always say to himself, wherever he may be, and whatever he may be doing, 'I am here to put my Master's Talents to better interest; I am watching all that goes on, with an eye above all things to my Master's business,' he is safe. The character that is formed in the market-place is not what we should ordinarily describe as spiritual. But the character of the man who goes there to do his Master's work is distinctly spiritual. All that would be worldliness, or shrewdness, in the one, becomes part of the equipment of a

distinctly spiritual character in the other, for the character is interpreted by the secret force which sets all its machinery in motion ; therefore the long-sighted prudence, the power of shrewd and rapid tactical decision, the plodding perseverance, the keen-sighted business capacity, all these in the mere man of business are one thing, in the man who develops these powers in the service of Christ they are a very different thing.

And the Virgins had to keep the lamp of the inner life trimmed, with the steady flame dispelling the darkness. They were to watch. That was their vocation, to wait and to watch, standing as it were upon the threshold of another world, with the sounds of this world hushed, their eyes gazing into the darkness beyond, and their ears stretched to catch the distant sound of His footsteps. 'Their loins girded about, their lights burning, and they themselves like unto men that wait for their Lord when He will return from the wedding.' [1]

The world could ill afford to dispense with either form of life ; there is work to be done, and God chooses the workers. But the workers in the active life will soon weary unless they are supported and aided by those who lead the hidden life of sacrifice and prayer, and God chooses those who are to give themselves to each.

Thus we have the pictures of two different types of life and character. Under one or other of these, more or less distinctly marked, all Christians may be ranged. Each has its own place, its own office, its own type of perfection, its own failures, and its

[1] S. Luke xii. 35.

own temptation. It is impossible to compare them, the highest virtues of the one would be imperfections in the other, the character developed by each is wholly unlike. We can, perhaps, more readily appreciate the difficulties and temptations of those who are described in the Parable of the Talents, as it is the type of the most ordinary vocation. Here the failure consisted, looked at from the point of view from which we are now considering the Parable, in an entire refusal to recognise the responsibility of life and its powers as a gift from God, for which an account must be given. The man who was condemned, was condemned because he had made no use of his gifts. He came out from the battle of life undeveloped, undisciplined, with what gifts he had unused. He had shrunk from life's struggle and competition, and had sought to pass through it with as little effort and trouble as possible.

And that other life—the life of the Virgins—surely has its terrible trials. How difficult it is, the life of one debarred from active work, shut out in the providence of God from the power even of helping others. All around, the breathless stillness of the silent night; nothing to excite, nothing to distract, nothing to change what may so quickly deteriorate into monotony and mechanical routine, nothing to give the refreshment of variety. The mind must rouse itself to find its interest in the thoughts of Him for whom it waits, or turn inward and feed in morbid fancy upon itself. There is nothing else to which it can turn for distraction or interest. All around it is the night, beyond lie all its hopes and the object of

its expectations. The eyes weary with looking into the darkness; the ear becomes strained, till it is startled by sounds which are the creation of its own fancy. Yes, the Virgin life of waiting upon the Bridegroom, of always waiting, has its terrible temptations too.

Some are ever girt, and the lamp burns steadily through the long hours of the night, but some grow weary, and let the lamp of the inner life of devotion grow dim, flicker with uncertain movements, and die out. One must work, with his eye fixed upon the end—his Master, to whom he must render account; the other must watch with unwearied patience, and unfailing prayer and love.

2. But the two Parables may be considered, again, not as contrasting two different forms of life, but as bringing out different aspects of the same life.

Considering them in this way, the men with the Talents are also the Virgins with the lamps. This must be the case with every true Christian's life. Looked at from one point of view he must work; he must do his duty in that state of life in which God has placed him; he must exercise and develop his talents; he must go out into the busy market-place of life's competition and struggle. Looked at from another point of view, amidst all this bustle and activity, within, in the inmost sanctuary, the soul stands clad in the Virgin's garment, with the lamp alight and trimmed, waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom. While the brains and hands are working, the soul is on its knees.

Take one signal example. Was there ever a life

more active and more crowded with work than S. Paul's? Travelling from one part of the world to the other, founding churches, writing epistles, going hither and thither with unwearied energy: 'In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils amongst false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.'[1] Yet amidst all this activity, verily the life of the man with the five talents in the market-place, what was his real life—his inner life—what does he say of himself? 'This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'[2] 'I do count all things but dung that I may win Christ.'[3] There is the Virgin soul, with loins girded about and lamp burning, waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom. All that outward life of unparalleled energy had but one interpretation, and the interpretation is to be found within. It was the inner life of love and devotion to the Person of our Lord that made S. Paul's life different from that of any other man who might have been the enthusiastic propagator of a cause in which he was interested. The strength, the indomitable strength

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 26, 27, 28. [2] Phil. iii. 13, 14. [3] Phil. iii. 8.

that thrived upon difficulties, and gained new energy from defeat, owed its existence to the fact of that inner life of silent worship and ministry to a Person of whom he never lost sight.

And if that inner life fails, the other must soon fail too. If within the lamp dies out and the Virgin ceases her vigil, it will not be long before the Talent is wrapped in the napkin and buried in the earth; the soul shrouded in inner darkness loses that spiritual sense which keeps alive the feeling of responsibility for gifts which can only be developed to their full in the service of another.

> 'Nor yet
> (Grave this within thy heart), if spiritual things
> Be lost through apathy, or scorn, or fear,
> Shalt thou thy humbler franchises support,
> However hardly won or justly dear.
> What came from heaven, to heaven by nature clings;
> And, if dissevered thence, its course is short.'

The man who wrapped his talent in a napkin and buried it, looked at in his inner life was a foolish Virgin who took no oil in the vessel and whose lamp had gone out.

But if the servant developing his master's talents must preserve the inner life of prayer, and devotion, and waiting upon Christ, who will deny that the life of the Virgin soul, waiting for the Bridegroom, has also the other side of action and conflict. Yes, truly, those whose days are spent on beds of sickness, or upon whom old age has laid its cold hand, and drawn them away from the many interests of life, or who, under the influence of a Divine Call, have left all that

they may wait upon Christ in fast and vigil, such persons know, as few others do, the active struggles with the unseen powers of darkness. The less their contact with men, the more awake they become to the direct efforts of the evil one to impede their progress or to deceive them—'the terror by night.' If their powers are not to be developed in the thoroughfares of the world, they are to be trained by the more searching and unceasing discipline of the spiritual conflict. Let them give up that struggle, let them cease to fight the phantoms of their minds, the weariness that at times paralyses every power of thought, the doubts whether they are not altogether deceived, the questionings of God's dealings with them, the coldness that numbs every spiritual faculty, the times of repugnance to prayer and communion with God. Let them give up such struggles as these, and soon the lamp flickers and grows dim. As soon as the will ceases the struggle to develop the Talents, the lamp ceases to burn.

But then come those mysterious words, 'while the Bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.' How are these words to be explained in either interpretation of the Parable which we have been considering? They *all* slumbered and slept—it was not only the foolish. Nor can we apply the two expressions that are used: one to the wise, 'they slumbered;' the other to the foolish, 'they slept.' Whatever in this matter the wise did, the foolish did also; they *all* slumbered and slept.

In following out the interpretation of the Parables which we have been considering, sleep would have

been fatal. How, then, are we to explain these mysterious words? I think they may be explained in this way.

There is alike in the best and worst a vast part of our nature undeveloped. We do not know ourselves, or what powers for good or evil lie dormant within us; we never shall know till the whole soul and all its possibilities spring into life and wakefulness at the last great cry, 'Behold! the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him.' A great part of the nature of everyone of us lies dormant as long as we are in this world. There come in the lives of most men great crises, types and foreshadowings of the last great crisis, which waken a side of their nature of which they were scarcely conscious before. It was so in that great crisis of the Apostles' lives when they came under the influence of our Lord. 'It must have been that their life with Him had deepened the sense of the mystery of their lives. They had seen themselves in their intercourse with Him as capable of much more profound and various spiritual experience than they had thought possible before. And this possible life, this possible experience, had run both ways up and down. They had recognised a before unknown capacity for holiness, and they had seen also a before unknown power of wickedness. Their sluggishness had been broken up, and they had seen that they were capable of Divine things. Their self-satisfied pride had been broken up, and they had seen that they were capable of brutal things; heaven and hell had opened above their heads and beneath their feet. They had not thought it incredible when Christ said,

"I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you to Myself;" and they did not think it incredible when He said, "One of you shall betray Me." The life with Christ had melted the ice in which they had been frozen, and they felt it in them either to rise to the sky or to sink to the depths.' Or, again, 'Look at Adam with the forbidden apple. Is it only that one sin which terrifies him and makes him dread the coming of God, which had been once the joy of the garden day? Is it not that, pressing up behind that sin, he sees the long procession of sins which he and his descendants will commit. A pure honest boy cheats with his first little timid fraud, and, on the other side, the bad side of him, the door flies open and he sees the possibility that he, too, should be the swindler whose heinous frauds make the whole city tremble. The slightest crumbling of the earth under your feet makes you aware of the precipice; the least impurity makes you ready to cry out as some image of hideous lust rises before you: "Oh, is it I? Can I come to that?"'[1]

Who could have told of the dormant powers of devotion and love to our Lord that lay slumbering in the breast of Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, only waiting for Christ to come into his life to waken them into activity? Or who could have seen the possibilities of purity and Divine love that lay dormant in the Magdalene possessed with seven devils? Or, on the other hand, who could have foreseen the depths of baseness and treachery that were dormant

[1] See Sermons by Right Rev. Philips Brooks, Bishop of Massachusetts.

in Judas when he left all and followed Christ? Yet there it all was. Who could have foretold the dormant powers of cruelty and ingratitude that slumbered in Jerusalem a few weeks before Good Friday, which were to be wakened when the direct question was put to a careless and fickle crowd, 'What shall I do with Jesus that is called Christ?'

These were moments of wakening, but how much more still slumbers within? Indeed, is it not true that the most active and energetic, whether for good or evil, are but half awake in this life compared with the powers that they will exercise in the life beyond the grave? We are constantly wakening up to a sense of possibilities unfulfilled, of ideals unrealised, of a power of love and hate of good and evil whose force and intensity we cannot measure.

And thus we may say that the most active in the market-place is, after all, as compared with what one day he may become, like a Virgin whose lamp is alight, and who, while waiting, slumbers till the Bridegroom's coming rouses her into perfect wakefulness. Or, on the other hand, the sluggard who will not face life's responsibilities and demands, is like the sleeping Virgin whose lamp is fast dying out, and who is by the Bridegroom's call wakened to find herself deprived of what little was left her, and for ever shut out from the possibility of development in the darkness that must shroud her eternally.

We do sometimes get glimpses of what a revelation that last complete awakening will be. Christ comes now by the cross or by some great trial into a family, and we are wholly unprepared for the revela-

tion of character that is displayed. How often at such times the one least thought of comes to the front and discloses powers of self-sacrifice and endurace that surprise us; and another, from whom we expected better things, shows a selfish and cowardly nature, hitherto unawakened, dormant, but, perhaps, quite unknown to the person who exhibits it! The persecutions that beset the Church in its youth were, verily, the going forth of the cry, 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh.' And what revelations they made! How the spirit of the martyrs often lay dormant under a light and easy exterior, and the spirit of an apostate in a character that seemed to men earnest and devout.

We need, therefore, to watch the tendencies that show themselves from time to time in us, to study carefully and seriously the revelations that sudden and unexpected trials manifest to us, that we may not in the last moment of life, at the cry that calls us forth, whether we will or not to meet the Bride-room, waken up for the first time to realise that we are altogether different from that which we had believed ourselves *to be.*

The Talents

THE TALENTS

'For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one ; to every man according to his several ability ; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents : behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant : thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed : and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed : thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance : but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'—S. Matt. xxv. 14–30.

XI

THE TALENTS

THIS Parable incidentally teaches—

1. That all God's gifts are given to us in their germ, and depend upon us for their development. The five Talents have the capacity, in the skilled hand of their possessor, of producing five talents more ; but it requires his energy and determination to develop them. They do not increase by an inherent capacity in themselves, the power is in the man, not in the gift. No powers of body, mind, or spirit are given us in a state of ripeness and maturity, they are entrusted to us in an undeveloped condition ; the work of life is to discover and unfold all that can be got out of our gifts. They are handed over to us, these Talents of our Master, entrusted to us for life to make what we can, or what we like out of them, or, if we are so minded, to make nothing out of them at all, but to leave them to rust and decay. We are entirely free as to what we may do with them, we may use them or abuse them, or leave them altogether unused.

But it is necessary sometimes that we should remind ourselves that no gift is so great as to overmaster the will, and force its own growth. All depends upon what we will do with our Talents. In considering, therefore, the value of any great endowments of heart, or intellect, or soul, before we can

measure their real worth, there is one other thing that we must consider, the will of the man who owns them ; the ultimate value and usefulness of all those gifts depends upon the character of the will. If it be unstable, or unreliable, or weak, or lacking in perseverance, the noblest gifts may prove worthless. We meet with many men of great talents from time to time who have never made any use of them, either for themselves or for the world, because they were too slothful to endure the discipline and self-restraint necessary to develop them. God has so ordered that the value of any gift, however brilliant, depends upon the character, not the character upon the gift. If the character is strong and firm, and serious and conscientious, the gifts unfold in such a genial soil and enrich the whole person with their fruits, but if the character be lacking in such virtues, the gift that was full of so much promise will never ripen, nor will its owner be any the richer for it.

It is interesting for us to notice that God has so ordered our life that, in handing over to us the Talents with which He entrusts us, He bids us, if we would make the best of them, gather around them a well-disciplined army of virtues to unfold their treasures, for virtue alone seems to understand the manipulating of these gifts, what to do with them, and how to do it. They become crystallised, or decay and fall to pieces in the hands of vice, or indeed of any other powers except virtue.

This is certainly true of every Talent, even though it develop to its fullest capacity in a bad man, and even though he only uses it for bad, or at any rate,

unworthy ends. Nevertheless, the Talent, whatever it may be, grows under the hand of virtues alone. Suppose the case of a most unprincipled and unscrupulous man of business who has got that special gift, whatever it may be, which from the first ensures him success. He uses this gift to push his way at the expense of many another man; he never hesitates to do a dishonest act if it is likely to advance his ends one inch. That great gift has to all appearances been developed amidst a devil's brood of vices, lying, dishonesty, selfishness, hardness, cruelty. But is this really the case? On the contrary, if you could have watched the growth of that great Talent, you would have seen that its guardians and instructors were not vices, but such virtues as a patience that never grew weary, hope that never yielded to the discouragement of failure, a vast and wide-reaching self-denial, and years of self-discipline in which pleasure and many forms of self-indulgence were sacrificed to the development of this Talent, a tenacity of purpose such as we find in saints and martyrs, a self-control that seemed a fair imitation of the Christian virtue that only grows under the influence of the grace of God. No, the Talent developed and matured not under the hands of vice but of virtue; virtue was the only voice it obeyed, virtue the only touch to which it responded.

As the Talent grew, the man used it for selfish and evil purposes, and it hatched a hornet's nest of vices, but it was itself the child, the pupil of virtue. Yes, and every vice that touched it injured it, and tended eventually to weaken its power.

Thus the Talents are entrusted to men in their

undeveloped state, that the character of those to whom they have been given may be trained by the effort to develop them, and stimulated by the promise which they hold out. Those servants as they received from their master the many or few Talents, could have scarcely realised how their whole moral character must necessarily at once gather around and depend upon the development and use of their Talents. Their development was, as a matter of fact, the one question before the Throne of Judgment.

Now we readily perceive that all this is true of natural gifts, the gifts with which we are born into the world. We know that they are given us only in germ, and that it depends upon ourselves whether they are ever developed or not. But it is equally true of supernatural gifts, the gifts bestowed upon us at our second birth in Baptism. If it requires years of study to develop the powers of the intellect, it needs even more to develop the powers of faith and grace. For we must remember that all those spiritual gifts which are bestowed upon us in Christ through Baptism, depend upon our will for their development just as truly as do the gifts of nature. People often speak and act as if they expected the powers of grace and faith to assert themselves spontaneously, and to develop by their own inherent force, but they are mistaken. If they were to do so, the character would be none the better for such external ornaments—they would not enrich or develop in any sense the person. These gifts, however great and however supernatural, cannot work independently of the will. The will must take them and use them, and weave them into the

very texture of our being. The weakness in and distaste for the things of the spiritual life can, in many cases, be traced to the same kind of feeling that a man experiences when, with an untrained and undisciplined mind, he tries to think out some deep problem. The will is too sluggish to hold the mind concentrated, and he gives it up in disgust.

Thus in the special aspect of life which this Parable is meant to present to us, life's failure is traced to the failure to recognise the moral responsibility that rests upon all to develop the powers committed to them, and that in the refusal to do this, the virtues, under whose care alone these powers can be developed, are not found, and so the whole character is left undeveloped.

> 'He fixed thee midst this dance
> Of plastic circumstance.
> This present thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest;
> Machinery just meant
> To give thy soul its bent,
> Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.'

'Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.'

2. But, again, the Parable incidentally shows us that God's gifts are unevenly distributed. We cannot deny that it is so with natural gifts; experience forces the fact upon us every day. 'To one, He gives five; to another, two; to another, one.' It is so with the distribution of this world's goods, with gifts of

intellect, influence, personal attractions, and the multitude of things in life which equip and fit men for position and power. But while we recognise this in regard to natural gifts, we do not perhaps like to believe that it is the same with spiritual endowments.

Yet it undoubtedly is. Some are far more richly endowed with spiritual gifts than others. It is not merely through lack of earnestness of purpose or strength of will, or through lack of faith, that we are not all as full of love as S. Francis, or as gifted with prayer as S. Theresa, or as inflamed with zeal as S. Paul. We have not got the spiritual gifts which they had. It would be as impossible for us all to be as great saints as these, as it would be for us to be as great writers as Shakespear. And yet, I think that the failure to recognise this is sometimes the cause of complete spiritual failure.

People aim sometimes at what they have not the spiritual power to attain to, and because they so hopelessly fail to reach their aim, they despair and give up altogether. Doubtless the most common danger is the failure to aim high enough, the resting content with a low standard; but it cannot be denied, that there is, for some people at least, the other danger arising from a restless spiritual ambition that will not be content to tread the beaten path of humility and lowliness.

God does not ask of us the impossible tasks which some of us put upon ourselves. How many overtax their strength with prayers that are above the standard of their lives and beyond their spiritual capacity in length and expression. If some people would be suffi-

ciently humble to acknowledge to themselves that they are not advanced enough in spiritual things to pray for so long a time, and would try to proportion the length of their prayers to their spiritual capacity, they would find that prayer was not a weariness and a hopeless struggle with a weakness that always triumphed, but a strength, a blessing, a joy, and withal a humbling and wholesome exercise. There is the same danger in the use of the Sacraments; too frequent Communions and Confessions not uncommonly lead to a revulsion of feeling which ends in the giving up of the Sacraments altogether.

All such cases, and there are many of them, can, I believe, be traced more or less directly to the failure, or the refusal, to recognise that spiritual gifts are as unevenly distributed as the gifts of nature, and that all are not capable of the same high standards in spiritual any more than they are in intellectual things. We may say of the gifts of faith, of prayer, of the love of God, of the spirit of mortification, 'to one He gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.' No doubt, to be content with a low standard is one thing and a very bad thing, but to be content with one's gifts is wholly another and a very good thing. He who is content with the standard that he has reached, has announced to the world his failure; and he who will never learn his limitations must fail as hopelessly, though his failure may have in it more noble elements. But he who has learnt his limitations, and then within those limitations strives for the best his talents per-

mit him to aim for, has the secret not of failure but of success.

> 'Ah! but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,
> Placid and perfect with my art: the worse.'[1]

3. But the Parable also teaches us that the final judgment is not concerned with the nur ber of Talents possessed by each, but only with what each has done relatively to his own endowment. The same words of praise and commendation are spoken to the man who had two talents as to him who had five, and no doubt it would have been the same with him who had only one, had he developed that one to its full capacity. God does not thus test the failure or success of our lives by their results as compared with others, but by the results as compared with the powers He has given to each individual. If you have been given but one talent, you will be judged only by what that talent could have produced and was intended to produce; and though you may be surrounded on all sides by men of many more talents than yourself, if you honestly strive to get out of your one talent one talent more, you are as acceptable in His sight as any of them. 'Lord,' said one of old, 'and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.'[2]

When once we turn aside and try to estimate the worth of what little we have been able to do in life, by comparing it with the work of another, we set ourselves utterly and fatally wrong. Such compari-

[1] Browning: *Andrea del Sarto.* [2] S. John xxi. 21, 22.

sons can only lead to self-satisfaction or to despair, results equally fatal to the soul's true development. It is remarkable that in this Parable the man who failed was the man with one talent, the man of fewest gifts, not, as we should have imagined, the man of many gifts. It would seem at first as if the experience of life would lead us to a different conclusion. The gifted men are the tempted men. Every additional gift brings with it a new temptation, it involves new responsibilities, it is likely to increase the influence of the man who possesses it, and to force him into positions which are surrounded with temptation. What do the poor, unnoticed, unneeded men in the world know of the temptations of those who keep the machinery of the great world going? 'How hardly,' said our Lord, of one class of gifts, 'shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God.'[1] And S. Paul tells us that 'not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.'[2] And yet here our Lord shows us the wise, the mighty, the noble—in other words, the talented men—true to God in life, and the poor and untalented as faithless.

And this certainly is true to experience also. If the men of great gifts have their great dangers,

[1] S. Mark x. 23. [2] 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

and when they do fail, their world-disturbing failures, those men whose gifts are below the average have very special difficulties and dangers of their own. It brings a man many temptations to feel that he is sought after, looked up to, depended upon; to feel himself in a position in which, by a tampering with truth or with honesty, he might in a moment spring into the first place in the land. It involves many temptations for anyone to know that his voice is supreme in science or art, or politics, or even in religion; to know that he has gifts that other men have not; that he can see further, that he can force men to think as he thinks, and to do what he wishes. But it involves a man in perhaps greater dangers to know that he is not needed, that no one cares what he says, that, in fact, he has nothing to say that is worth the trouble of saying; that whatever he may try to do there are others all around him who can do it better; to see the world filled with more capable men than himself, and to find that it makes no matter to anyone whether he tries to do right or hides himself away from care and disappointment behind his own good-for-nothingness. It must be a bitter humiliation to anyone to feel himself out of all the great movements of life; to know that he must never experience what he sees flashing in other men's eyes, the excitement of competition or of success.

Such men have their difficulties, and they are great and pressing. They get by degrees a morbidly low opinion of themselves, and an exaggerated opinion of the powers of others. They learn to feel so sure that they will fail, and that others will surpass

them, that finally they do not even try to succeed. These men and women run the danger of never doing anything, not even the little they can do, and might do well; they become timid and cringing, and mean-spirited and cowardly, and let all the life ebb out of them. And yet this low opinion which they have formed of themselves is the very reverse of humility; for humility is never morbid, never demoralising; indeed, one who gets into this way of contemplating himself as a failure, never can be really humble. Such people gradually lose all noble thoughts and high ambitions, and settle down into a quiet monotonous life of weak self-absorption and self-indulgence, and their hearts become full of bitterness and acrimony, blaming all the world for their unhappiness.

It has been well said, 'This is the history of so much of the inefficiency of many of the men that we see about us. These men have looked at life and given up in despair. Once, long ago, when they were in college, when they first went into business, they took their Talent out and gazed at it, and wondered how they should invest it; but it looked so little that they lost all heart, and wrapped it in a napkin, where it has been ever since, and that is the whole story of their useless lives. And yet one thing seems clear, that only by the waking up of men like these, only by new courage put into their hopelessness, can the world really make trustworthy growth. It seems very certain that the world is to grow better and richer in the future, however it has been in the past; not by the magnificent achievements of the

highly gifted few, but by the patient faithfulness of the one-talented many. If we could draw back the curtains of the millennium, and look in, we should see, not a Hercules here and there standing on the world-wasting monsters he had killed, but a world full of men each of moderate muscle, but each triumphant over his own little piece of the obstinacy of earth or the ferocity of the brutes. It seems as if the heroes had done almost all for the world that they can do, and not much more can be done till common men awake and take their common tasks. I do believe the common man's task is the hardest. The hero has the hero's aspiration that lifts him to his labour, and great duties are easier than the little ones, though they cost far more blood and agony. But surely we may come to feel that the very certainty that the world must be saved by the faithfulness of commonplace people is what is needed to rescue such people from commonplaceness in their own age, and clothe their lives with the dignity which they seem so wofully to lack, and which, if any man does not see somewhere shining through the rusty texture of his life, he cannot live it well.'

Now what is the cause of the failure of these men? Why do very limited gifts tend to produce such characters? It certainly is not the necessary consequence of living with men of great talents; many such have been saints, and determined to do what little they could, and have achieved results altogether incommensurate with their gifts.

The man in the Parable shall tell his own tale, and give us the reason of his failure. He says to

his Judge: 'I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed, and I was afraid, and went and hid my talent in the earth.' This was the reason of his failure; a radically wrong conception of the character of God, a conception which must indeed paralyse all moral action. The only thought which he had of God was one which inspired not love but fear, nay, which destroyed all possibility of love, for how could he love a God whom he could not respect, and how could he respect a God whose chief moral relationship to His creatures he believed to be injustice?

The words are few, but they disclose a long tale of bitterness and resentment, and indignant protest against his condition. His idea apparently was, that God expected a certain amount of work done which he had not the power to do; prayers said which he could not say, temptations resisted which he didn't think he had the power to resist. He tested himself, and found himself wanting according to his idea of God's requirements, and then he folded the one talent which he knew that he did possess in a napkin, and buried it in the earth. And who could blame him? Who could thrive, or grow, or dare, or venture anything living in the frowning Presence of so relentless, so unjust a God? It would be impossible. Any man who had such a conception of God, in proportion as God was a reality to him, would find himself paralysed and numbed in His Presence. There is nothing for it but to wrap whatever talents he may be possessed of in a napkin, and bury them.

We are not all of us aware, probably, what a strong

influence in the formation of our character is our conception of God's character. 'Be ye perfect,' says our Lord, 'even *as* your Father which is in heaven is perfect,'[1] in other words, be Godlike. And, on the other hand, the Psalmist assures us that our conception of God's character will be more or less reflected from our own. 'With the holy thou shalt be holy, and with a perfect man thou shalt be perfect; with the clean thou shalt be clean, and with the froward thou shalt learn frowardness.'[2]

But we may ask further how did this man come to form so false a conception of the character of God as to suppose that He would judge him by a standard altogether independent of the gifts of nature and of grace which He had given him.

I think he formed it from a false view of life. His idea of life apparently was that it was a place of emulation, in which he must cope with, and surpass, or at least, equal others, or fail. He compared his powers with those of men about him, and found himself wanting; and then, instead of living his own life as best he could, and using what gifts he had, he allowed himself to be tormented with the spirit of envy and discontent. His words seemed weak, his deeds seemed poor, when compared with those with whom his lot was cast. He was ever living in the presence of, measuring himself by the standard and attainment of, others. What was the use of saying a few prayers at the end of a busy day, tired and exhausted, when he saw the length of time which others spent in prayer? What was the use of a few kindly acts done now and then to his fellows,

[1] S. Matt. v. 48. [2] Ps. xviii. 26.

when other men devoted their lives and wealth to help them? What was the use of saying now and again a word of protest against some crying evil, or, harder still, standing out against some evil custom, when one's influence was so very small? And so one thing after another is given up, and he becomes more bitterly conscious how entirely he is left behind in the great movements of life. He is no use to anyone, and only a burden and a disappointment to himself. From this condition of mind it needs but a short step to attribute his failure to God. He leads himself to imagine that God asks of him what nothing but his own rebellious pride asks, and that his failure to do things which he was never intended to do is a failure before God. He will not listen to the suggestion of his conscience, that perchance God only asks of him the more lowly task, the less obtrusive life. And thus gradually, but surely, his life modifies and helps to shape his faith; and finally, he formulates his dark and cheerless creed, 'Thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. I am afraid of thee.' If perfect love casts out fear, such despairing fear obliterates every trace of love. Such was the moral cause of this man's misbelief, and eventually of the complete failure of his life. The lesson of the Parable is a bracing and an encouraging one. 'Do what you can,' it seems to say, 'use your one gift, if you have only one,' and it does not tell us of any who had no Talent; 'don't be discouraged because others can do so much more, and have so much larger opportunities than yourself. For each stands alone before God with his life so inter-

laced with all the concerns of the place and time in which he lives, that he cannot do his duty to God and neglect these things. Each in his own place, and amidst his own surroundings, must develop his talent, and so form his own character, help the world, and glorify God.'

The Patched Garment

THE PATCHED GARMENT

'No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.'—S. Luke v. 36.

XII

THE PATCHED GARMENT

THIS Parable is repeated three times, here and in S. Matthew ix. 16 and S. Mark ii. 21. While the Parable is practically the same as given by the three Evangelists, there is a slight difference in S. Luke's account. In S. Matthew and S. Mark the new piece is taken from any piece of cloth, in S. Luke, according to two readings, it is cut out of a whole garment, and there are consequently two results: it rendeth the new, and the new agreeth not with the old. The two garments, both the new and the old, are spoilt together; the new because it has been rent to patch the old, the old because it is disfigured by a piece of different cloth. S. Matthew and S. Mark add that the new piece taketh away a part of the old, and the rent is made worse, owing to the stronger quality of the new cloth.[1]

In each of the three Evangelists the Parable follows a discussion about fasting. Having answered His inquiries S. Luke proceeds, 'And He said also.' It has been said that this expression, which occurs so often in S. Luke, always indicates the point at which our Lord, after having treated of the particular subject before Him, rises to a more general view, which commands the whole question. Thus, from these

[1] Godet on S. Luke *in loco*.

words on, He makes the particular difference on the subject of fasting subordinate to the contrast between the old and the new order of things.

He says, 'I am not come to reform an old system, to patch up Judaism by certain reformations, but to substitute a new garment for an old one. You bid Me command My disciples to fast as John did; John could only act as a reformer, he could but put one more patch upon the old garment of Judaism, the very principle of fasting will be different with My disciples when they are clad in the Christian garment of grace. They must wait for the new life before they receive its forms; it is impossible to anticipate it by adapting to the legal system under which they are now living the elements of the new state which is to be given them.'

His mission is not to repair an institution decaying and waxing old, but to 'make all things new.' To mix up the old work with the new would be to spoil both. None could judge of the new by the piece cut off, and it never could harmonise with the old—the rent would be made worse. A patch cut out of the system of the Gospel and stitched on to some specially threadbare portion of the Law would not really mend it where it failed. Man needed to be clothed altogether in a new garment. As one commentator says,[1] 'The work of Jesus is too good to use it in repairing the worn-out garment of Pharisaic Judaism, which could never thereby be made into anything better than the assumed garment of a beggar.'

[1] Lange, quoted by Godet.

Our Lord, then, teaches in this Parable, broadly, that He will not have fragments of His teaching fastened on to other systems; that He will not patch up a worn-out system or a worn-out nature; that His work is a higher one—He will regenerate.

And the warning of the Parable is one that is always necessary. It is not an uncommon thing to find men who constantly puzzle us; at one time they seem devout, religious, earnest, at another superficial, irreligious, positively bad; and we wonder what it means. How is it possible for a person to be so evidently sincere at one moment and so bad at another? We are sometimes inclined to think that their religion must be mere hypocrisy; but I think we may find the answer in this Parable. Their nature has lost its unity, it is patched. They have fastened a patch of religion on to their old unconverted, unsanctified self.

Such people, we shall often find, have passed through a crisis, and have turned to God so far as to bring religion into their lives and to feel, to a certain limited extent, the influence of religion, but not so far as to change their hearts. The old views of life remain, with another view added, but not taking the place of the old. The taste for the old sins remains unchecked in its full force, though upon the surface the sins may be given up. There is no penetration of their nature by the grace of God, no quickening of the pulses of a new life down in the depths of the soul. There is no transforming power acting upward from within which must eventually change the whole being, like the stirring of the sap in the tree covered

with last winter's leaves, when the spring comes. There is in a word no interior radical change, only a patch of religion stitched on to an irreligious and unconverted heart, and hence the dualism that looks like hypocrisy.

We witness the two portions, now the religious, now the real self, and we see the religious portions not, as in its normal condition, wrestling with all that is evil in the nature, and striving to gain the victory; *that* we could understand; but here we see them side by side, having no influence upon one another, having no organic connection; the religious influences having no power to flow over and sanctify the unhallowed nature, but merely attached to it, in a superficial way —'the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.'

Those who look on at this unedifying process do not see the power of Christianity, 'the new maketh a rent'—the garment of the Christian life has been torn to supply the patch; if they have never seen the Christian life in its entirety, well may they disbelieve in its beauty or its power; and they do see that 'the new piece taketh away from the old and the rent is made worse;' the longer they study such a person the more clearly they perceive the widening breach in this double and unreal character—the separation between religion and practice, the character more and more loses its unity, and the naked, unsanctified nature is seen through the rent in the garment.

But there is another way in which the Parable acts as an illustration of what we frequently see in the Christian world.

Is it not often the case that people endeavour to

use the power of religion to cover up some specially worn-out and threadbare portion of their character? They do it, indeed, in all sincerity, yet it is bound to fail. We can never remind ourselves sufficiently that God does not demand of us merely a victory over this sin or that, but the elevation and sanctification of our whole character. It may be better for us to feel the full power of some sin or of some evil habit that we cannot get rid of for years, than to be able to gain the victory over it and feel no further need of God. We desire often, quite unconsciously, to stitch a religious patch over some tattered portion of our character, to bring the influence of grace and prayer upon that specially mean looking bit of ourselves; but we do not care to *grow holy*, to love God, to grow in grace. We want religion to conquer our humiliating sins, but not to raise the whole tone of our character, and this our Lord will not, cannot do. We pray and struggle with this sin, and it will not give way; we wonder why God refuses to hear or to answer our prayer. Our eyes are constantly turned with shame upon that gaping rent in the garment of our character, and we believe there is nothing we would not do to overcome that sin, but we don't care for a new garment. It has scarcely occurred to us how shabby and threadbare the whole garment is; we are not conscious how many other faults we are making no effort against; how unholy our whole nature is; how our thoughts of God are earthly and utilitarian. What we long for is a patch to cover one rent; what our Lord will alone supply is a new garment.

And so He leaves our prayer apparently unan-

swered ; the sin is to all appearance as deeply rooted and has as firm a hold upon us as ever. We grow more despairing ; it seems to us that God has forgotten us. But no, if He were to answer our prayer as we wish and expect, it would be the worst thing that could happen to us. At last we are driven to our Lord Himself with the cry for renewal ; our heart is wakened to the sense of the need of our Lord's Personal Presence ever with us. It is like the opening of the eyes of one born blind ; like the coming out of darkness into light. It is the realisation of all that Regeneration and its consequences mean—'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly ;'[1] 'Apart from Me ye can do nothing.'[2] It is not the mere victory over this one sin we need, but holiness, union with our Lord, Life. I desired that God would patch up my old dead nature that I might not see its shame—now I see that what I need is to realise in all its simple greatness what our Lord meant when he said, 'Behold, I make all things new ;'[3] 'No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old.' The New Man cannot patch up the life of the old man ; we must put off the old man with his affections and lusts, and put on the new.

The same principle explains the failures in various special forms of life to which different people have been called. The priesthood, the religious life, and other states in which some are called to serve God. The priesthood may be but a patch upon a life that

[1] S. John x. 10. [2] *Ibid.* xv. 5. [3] Rev. xxi. 5.

has no priestly character, no spirit of consecration. A man may pass from a very worldly and unspiritual life into the priesthood without having undergone any inner change, and at once we see it. His *life*, his interests, are in other things ; this is but something added. The true priest is penetrated and controlled by his vocation, everything else is subservient to it ; it is not an appendage to his life, it is his very life itself.

So with the religious life and other forms of dedication—'Where your treasure is there will your heart be also'[1]—if what we really value be elsewhere, there our heart will be, and consequently that which must be first and chiefest in our life to be of any real value becomes merely an appendage. In every call of God the command is 'Give Me thy heart ;' it demands deep interior surrender ; a superficial yielding to a call is but an unsightly patch.

The same line of thought might be followed out in regard to faith as well as practice. Our faith is not to be a patchwork, made up of pieces cut from other systems and stitched together ; it must not even have one patch, it must be woven without seam from top to bottom. The acceptance of the faith is the acceptance of a system, the threads of whose doctrines interweave and form one whole. The interlacing of these threads, woven so as to form a definite shape, is the blending and the harmonising of the many truths of Christianity in perfect proportion and in perfect form. It is necessary to preserve the proportion of faith as well as to accept its doctrines. Unbalanced truth or exaggerated forms of truth deteriorate into positive

[1] S. Matt. vi. 21.

error. The Garment of Christ which is to clothe the Christian is the faith of Christ containing all the doctrines of revelation, and all in due proportion and relation one to the other. Therefore, to cut a piece out of this garment and to stitch it on to our own system where it is ragged and unseemly is to spoil both. Its truth consists in its unity. A piece of the truth, one doctrine of the faith, or twenty doctrines separated from the rest, may in fact be untruth. The faith of the Christian does not consist, therefore, in various pieces or doctrines of Christianity stitched on to the system of his own unsanctified reason. Such a patchwork system is not Christianity at all. These isolated doctrines detached from the seamless garment of the truth do but arouse antagonism to Christianity, and justly so. 'The piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old, and the rent is made worse.' The rent between the old and new becomes so obvious as in many cases to make shipwreck of faith altogether. S. Paul shows us that, if we leave out of the Creed the one article on the Resurrection of the body, we cannot hold the Christian faith at all. 'If the dead rise not then is not Christ raised, and if Christ be not raised your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins.'[1] In a vast number of cases, no doubt, the difficulties that present themselves to men's minds in accepting Christianity is the fact that what they are considering is not really Christianity, but some such patchwork system of reason and certain isolated doctrines of the faith. They see the unreasonableness, the disagreement,

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 16, 17.

between the new and the old ; they see the rent, and reason revolts against accepting what in truth is most unreasonable.

The faith, therefore, must be accepted as a whole ; and as a whole it fits and suits our nature. It will be found that it does not really hamper, but rather lends grace to every movement of the mind ; that it does not need to be worn for long before it manifests that marvellous power of adapting itself to the form of the wearer while preserving its own essential shape unchanged. Such is the offer of Christ to man—a perfect robe to clothe and beautify every faculty of his nature—man's method is but a clumsy effort to conceal defects by patchwork.

The Good Samaritan

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.'—S. Luke x. 30–37

XIII

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

THE Parable of the Good Samaritan was spoken by our Lord in answer to the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' But that question itself was asked by the Lawyer who put it with a view to evading a difficulty. He had asked of Christ the question that had been put to Him on several occasions by different inquirers, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' Our Lord's answer was a surprise to him by its simplicity and its directness. It was probably put as a kind of leading question, rather in a controversial spirit than for the purpose of receiving any instruction from the Great Teacher. He asked it 'tempting Him,' not necessarily with any malicious intention, but rather with a view to opening an interesting religious discussion.

But our Lord's answer did not lend itself to such a discussion. It was too simple, too practical, and quite impossible to controvert. 'You, a scribe, a student of the Law, need not ask such a question. You know what the Law commands; do it and you shall live. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself. The standard which you have set yourself is a true one; live up to it.' But the Lawyer will not let the matter end here. This following out of the Law in its lofty and wide-reaching commands, presented a difficulty to him. It was not

as we might have supposed, and as would have been natural, a moral difficulty ; it was an intellectual one. He was able, he felt, to satisfy the requirements of the Law as to loving God with all his heart and soul and strength, and he was able, too, to love his neighbour as himself ; the only difficulty he had found in his effort to live up to this exalted standard lay in the question Who is my neighbour? The heart that could rise to so perfect a love to God as the Law required and so well regulated a love for man, was held in check by an intellectual difficulty as to the limit and extent to which this love was to reach. 'Who is my neighbour?' No one cares to waste his love on unworthy objects : that, indeed, is only natural ; but this man did not care to give his love outside of the limits of the Law's requirements ; he would love those whom it was necessary to love in order that he might keep the letter of the Law and inherit eternal life, but not one other.

He had, it appeared, no real desire to love at all. He did not love men because he found them so lovable and because the spontaneous utterance of his heart bade him love them ; he could go in and out amongst his fellow creatures,—this man who found no difficulty in loving God with all his heart and soul and strength,—with no natural outflow of love towards them ; but so completely had he his heart under control, that any whom the Law commanded him to love he could and did love, but none else! This was the idea of love which possessed his mind when he gave so admirable a summary of the Law, the same, indeed, as our Lord Himself had given. But it is obvious that his conception of the love to be

given, whether to God or man, was a very different one from our Lord's. His question was verily a revelation of the state of his soul. It seems almost incredible that a man should have expressed in such noble words the true inner meaning of the Law and should have so mean and poor a conception of what it involved. Had he asked another question, not 'Who is my neighbour?' but, 'How shall I get this power of loving him?' he would but have put into words the question that every devout man and woman longs to have answered. But this scribe found no such difficulty as that. He had all the love that God or man could demand of him; it flowed at full flood. His only difficulty was the intellectual one, as to what persons he was under the obligation of loving and whom he might leave out unloved—perhaps hated!

How different is this concise, prim, self-satisfied Jew in face of the wide-sweeping and unyielding requirements of the Law, from S. Paul. This man had apparently succeeded in bringing the vast and complex powers of his nature under the measure of the Law's requirements, to his own complete satisfaction. He had stretched himself to the letter of its commands, or, rather, cramped himself within the limits of the letter, and had found within it the serenity of moral self-approval. Whatever difficulties arose in his mind were of a purely intellectual character as to the meaning of certain terms which it used. There was no moral dissatisfaction wakened in his soul as it stood before the stern words written upon stone, at once commanding and condemning. S. Paul, on the contrary, though

he, too, 'as touching the Law,' was 'blameless,' felt how utterly it failed to give him any deliverance from the sense of moral condemnation; 'it became to him rather the deadliest and most terrible of evils.' When it 'came' to him, when he really came to understand what Law was, the sin he once thought dead in him revived in the presence of this restraining law and 'slew him,' so that the commandment, 'ordained to life,' he found to be unto death.[1] For this Law, with all its awful power, wakes in him another and a mightier law, 'a law in his members,' a law of lawlessness, an intolerance of all restraint, a force of resistance that no mechanical power of repression can restrain. And this lawlessness, this impossibility of subjection to Law, is the very bent of his nature. It is his very self, and yet it is not himself. There is in him another and a better self that delights in Law, longs to obey it, and yet cannot enable him, the whole man, to obey it. And so he finds within him a terrible strife, a conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, law and lawlessness, conscience and will, that rends him in twain and forces from him, in the misery that it wakes in every fibre of his moral being, the exceeding great and bitter cry, 'Oh, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me?'[2]

Truly, these two Jews, who each of them lived under the same Law, and each with a certain amount of self-approval as to the observance of its letter, had gained very different experiences in the same school. The one, struggling with this Law that showed him

[1] Rom. vii. 9.
[2] Magee's *Gospel and the Age*: 'The Victor manifest in the Flesh.'

the depth of evil that was within him, and also its own incapacity to help, face to face with Christ, cries out for deliverance; the other has but a little flutter of intellectual perplexity, that ruffles the surface of a nature otherwise at rest in its mild self-complacency.

Now, how was such a man to be dealt with, and how was his question to be answered? He was doubtless sincere and, in perfect unconsciousness of the situation; 'willing to justify himself,' he put a question which exposed him for all time to the most severe condemnation.

How, then, was such a question as he proposed, and manifestly conceived worthy of consideration, to be answered? No doubt our Lord might have told him that such a question implied a lack of love, or he might have answered his question categorically by telling him that every man whom he met was his neighbour. But such an answer would, in fact, have proved useless, for if he was prepared to extend to everyone in the world in obedience to our Lord the kind of love which he imagined the Law demanded,—the only love apparently he knew anything about,—neither he nor the world would have been any the better for it.

No, the answer to his question, if it is to do him any good, must go deeper than removing any imagined difficulties as to the limit or range of the claim of neighbourship. His was one of those many cases in which men, honestly no doubt, but very mistakenly, attribute their difficulties to intellectual perplexities, when they are, in fact, moral.

It would do this man no good to be told who is his

neighbour. He imagines, if only he had a satisfactory answer to that question, he would not lack in fulfilling towards his neighbour all the stern and exacting requirements of the Law ; but his question shows how hopelessly he had deceived himself, and that what he needs to learn is not who is his neighbour, but what is the neighbourly spirit. He misunderstood the cause of his difficulty in fulfilling the Law. It was not instruction he needed ; it was conversion. The difficulty lay in the heart, not in the head.

And, therefore, our Lord does not answer his question ; he doesn't touch upon what this man thought was his one great difficulty ; but quietly and with extraordinary insight and tact, scarcely allowing the man at the moment to perceive the fulness of the rebuke He was ministering to him, he appeals directly to his heart and human instincts. He draws for this stultified Jew, whose nature was fast losing all that was freshest and most human, stiffened and stifled by legal technicalities, an exquisite picture of human nature, warm and overflowing with kindliness and pity, putting to itself no chilling questions of whether such acts are necessary or whether this wounded and bleeding fellow-creature comes under the legal definition of a neighbour or not, but giving full play to all the best instincts of his nature. How fresh the picture is ; how bracing the atmosphere for this cramped, self-conscious Jew. How healthy and invigorating. All the petty squabbles between Jew and Samaritan, all the national and religious bitterness in a moment are forgotten ; a true and healthy human heart is touched by the sight of human suffering, and, yielding to the

spontaneous impulses of nature, stoops to help the sufferer. Every detail of this exquisite picture stands in quiet and rebuking contrast to the Lawyer's question; there is in it all no question of fulfilling what is required or obeying a command, each act comes fresh from the heart; he does what he does because it is a pleasure to him to do it—he 'bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.' He lavishes upon him his care, never feeling he has done enough; this suffering man appeals to his heart, and the heart answers fully, spontaneously, royally.

With one master-stroke our Lord draws the contrast between such men as His questioner and such a spirit as he displayed, and this fresh and vigorous Samaritan. The priest and the Levite, the representatives of legalism as well as the impersonation of its spirit, 'came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.' There is a refinement, and at the same time a contrast, so ludicrous as almost to amount to satire in the way in which our Lord revealed the Jew to himself in this episode; he did not *say* that is what *you* would do, still puzzling your brains over the question whether this man, bleeding to death, is your neighbour or not; but it would have been impossible for the man not to have felt the meaning and to have acknowledged the truth of what it implied.

And in the depths of the Lawyer's nature, almost crushed and stifled by the false method of his system, the spark of true human-kindness and sympathy still burnt, however feebly. Our Lord makes a bold appeal to it and it responds : 'Which of these three was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves, and he said, He that showed mercy on him.' When the appeal was made directly to his moral nature, and the revelation was made to him at once of what he was and what he ought to be, he saw the truth and acknowledged it.

This was indeed the very method of the Incarnation itself; when men blinded and misusing their lives and wasting their strength in unprofitable speculations were brought face to face with the true ideal of manhood, they bowed before it and accepted it.

So our Lord, instead of answering this Jew who was perplexing his mind with intellectual quibbles, brings before him a warm and living picture of true human-kindness and neighbourliness, and he recognised it and no doubt perceived that the secret reason of his question was that he himself was altogether wanting in it.

But we may proceed to inquire, What was the cause of such a strange spiritual condition as the Lawyer's question implied? How is it possible for a man, evidently desiring to do right, to get into such an unreal state as he displayed, living under the Law of God, striving to obey it, and doing so in such a way as to defeat its whole purpose? The Law had developed in this man just the very spirit that was most opposed to it. He himself said truly that the

Law might be summed up under the twofold duty of love to God and love to man, and, scarcely had he given this admirable and spiritual summary of the Law, than by a leading question he proceeds to display not only an ignorance of what that love is which the Law was meant to develop, but an entire misapprehension of its whole character. What he understood by love was not love at all, unless, indeed, it was a refined form of self-love.

On the other hand, the despised Samaritan, who had not the spiritual advantage, of the Jew, had that in which the Jew was so signally lacking. As S. Paul said, 'the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness, which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.'[1]

The Jew which followed after the Law, which bade him love his neighbour, shows in the Parable an entire lack of such love, and the Samaritan steps to the front and teaches the Jew the very chief lesson of his own Law.

The reason is surely not far to seek. All external laws of restraint and prohibition are only of value in so far as they help to develop a strong, positive, healthy life. The Law implies an unhealthy condition, it checks the unhealthy and morbid action of nature, but only that its currents may be directed into their proper channels. Passion is ever trying to find fresh outlets for its own indulgence; the Law stands over them and says, 'Thou shalt not.' But the purpose of

[1] Rom. ix. 30.

all these restraints is that that life which thus tries to find for itself wrong ways of indulgence, being checked and held back by the Law, may flow out freely and fully in its own deep channels of positive and healthy action ; if it is not doing this the Law is only a meaningless restraint, curbing and cramping, not developing, life. We bandage a broken limb that the bone may knit underneath, and that at last it may regain its own healthy life ; when the bandages have done their work, we take them off. We put ourselves under a rule of prayer that we may develop a prayerful spirit. We check our tongues from uncharitable gossip, that we may develop the spirit of charity ; we force ourselves to give conscientiously that we may develop the spirit of liberality. But if we merely do these external acts and never try to develop the interior spirit, which gives to them their only real value, then we make these acts an end in themselves, and we never advance any further ; the very Law which was meant to lead us on blocks the way ; we get entangled in its meshes, and instead of developing it stifles all higher aspirations ; we become satisfied, proud, boastful of doing and not doing things which are purposeless except in so far as they are preparatory to something else. The positive movements of life become checked and stifled by those very things which were intended to clear the way for their action.

This was the great cause of the failure of the Jews : they rested in the Law, they ' made their boast in the Law.' The Law was meant to be ' a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ,' they allowed it to come between them and Him of Whom it spoke, towards Whom it

pointed and for Whom it was meant to be a preparation. They made it an end in itself, discussed its details, rested in it, as if in the mere observance of its letter they were fulfilling its end. And thus that which ought to have developed the positive life of action and directed all its currents to their proper end stopped the flow and turned it inward upon itself.

So with this scribe. He failed to grasp the meaning of his own summary of the Law, he had no doubt learnt it by rote without understanding it; had he really understood it he could not have asked the question he did. For what his own words really meant was this: The Law forbids me to do anything that checks or injures, or is directly opposed to love. But the reason it forbids all this is, that love may flow forth, pure, strong, unadulterated. The meaning of the last six commandments is, Restrain yourself from all that can injure your neighbour, so as to make room for the outrush of the mighty stream of love in all its strength. The discipline of the Law is to destroy every unneighbourly act or feeling, that the neighbourly spirit may flow out unrestrained. But this scribe grasped nothing of this; he had never got beyond details. He could do what he was told; he could never initiate. He could not see great principles, principles of positive energetic action, underlying the details of the legal prohibitions; when, somehow or other, he had got hold of a principle he didn't understand it, he couldn't apply it. It was too large a thing for his mind to grasp or his hands to handle; it was crushed, lifeless and powerless, into the narrowing influence of his negative system of

morality. His mind was like the undeveloped mind of a child, he could not generalise, he could not see beyond the details of the immediate command. If his question, 'Who is my neighbour?' meant anything, it must have meant, Whom may I not murder, or steal from, or bear false witness against? For, if these things meant love, and if this love could be limited in its application and be applied only to a few select persons to be found here and there through life, then he was free from all these restrictions towards the rest of mankind.

He looks at the wounded traveller with untouched sympathies; this was an extraordinary case; if he was not commanded to help wounded travellers, there was no spontaneous instinct that bid him do it. Probably in the act of returning from the service of the Temple, he passes by on the other side. The Law, as he failed to enter into its spirit, crushed and stifled him. Truly these Jews needed to be set free from the Law, and that could be done for them only in one way—by bringing them into personal contact with the Law-giver. And then their hearts are stirred and wakened with all the sweet freedom of men that waken from a long and dreary slavery. For they learn that in loving Him their whole nature is set free for all that is best and noblest in it; if they love they can do what they please.

The Guest at the Wedding Feast

THE GUEST AT THE WEDDING FEAST

'And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms ; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room ; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him ; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place ; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room ; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher : then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased ; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—S. Luke xiv. 7–11.

XIV

THE GUEST AT THE WEDDING FEAST

THERE are two characteristics common to all forms of organic life :

(1) Each living thing is in itself a unit, and it is throughout the history of its life one from first to last. There can be no break in life. The great forest oak is one from the lowest fibre of the root to the topmost leaf of the highest branch. Anything that affects any part of the tree affects it as a whole. The *tree* is adorned by the blossom on the branch. The *tree* is injured if a branch be broken off. And it is one from the dawn of its life in the acorn till it falls dead in the forest. Its whole history is the history of one life. Anything that affects it in the earliest days of its life may leave its mark upon it till it dies.

This characteristic is common to all forms of life, the lowest as well as the highest. It is as true, nay, in a sense more true, of man than it is of the tree. He is one, and the history of his life from first to last is one whole. There is no breach, no gap in his life. Infant, child, youth and man, it is one and the same person that has passed through all these experiences. You may feel to-day the effects of what you did or suffered, as it seems to you, almost in another lifetime, it is so long ago. A thought may have sprung into your mind just now that owes its origin to events that

happened half a century ago; the continuity, with all that it involves, is unbroken as long as your personal life lasts, and that, we know, lasts for eternity.

(2) The other characteristic is that the greatest changes are effected by the most minute and imperceptible movements; changes so great that the thing to all appearance ceases to be what it was, and becomes something else. Yet it would be impossible for us to say at what moment such a change was completed. The seed is buried in the earth, and under the action of moisture and heat certain movements begin which the eye cannot detect; at last the green blade appears above the soil; it has started, as it were, upon a new phase of its life; and yet the process was so slow and the changes so minute that one could not tell at what moment the seed ceased to be a seed and became a growing plant. The chrysalis undergoes mysterious and imperceptible changes beyond the power of anyone to see or to detect; but the moment comes when these changes are accomplished and the chrysalis has ceased to be what it was as the butterfly comes forth into a new and seemingly altogether different existence. Yet, as a matter of fact, the continuity between the butterfly and the chrysalis, and between the plant and the seed, is never broken; the whole life of each is one.

In all these cases the greatest changes are effected by a process so slow and imperceptible that they are only made visible by their results. The mother is surprised to find that her child is no longer a child, but has become a man. There are no sudden leaps in Nature; her work is slow, steady, and lasting in its

effects. It is the same, too, with the downward movements of nature: sickness ends in death, life grows weaker as it passes along the pathway of disease, and then it goes out through the doorway of death and enters upon a new state, so different that it passes the power of our imagination to picture what it may be.

In all these developments of life the changes, when they come, are enormous. There is no possible resemblance between the growing blade and the seed, or between the butterfly and the chrysalis, or between the bird and the egg; it has ceased to be one thing and has become another; the door between those two stages is fast closed so that a return to the former stage is impossible. The man can never become a child; the bird can never become an egg; the tree can never again become a seed; and yet at what moment the change is finally effected and the threshold that leads from one form of life to another is crossed, it is impossible for anyone to say, yet when it is passed every eye can see it.

And it is the same with the more complex and subtle life of the soul. There are slow and mysterious movements ever going on within, beyond the power of the eye to see or the ear to hear, often beyond the power of the man himself to detect. At last there comes a moment when all these manifest themselves in a change. The man ceases to be what he was and becomes something quite different. The whole character has been revolutionised, yet the revolution took place so quietly, the dethroning of one power or passion and the enthroning of another, the loss of interest in one set of things and the awakening of

interest in others, that the man who is the subject of all these changes never dreamed of what was taking place within him. 'How changed you are,' says one friend to another, meeting after many years of separation, 'I should not have known you; your interests and tastes and feelings are altogether different from what they were when we met ten years ago.' 'Yes,' he answers, 'looking back over ten years, I did not know how different I was till I met you.'

If, then, such great changes are wrought by slow and almost unconscious movements within the soul, we shall not be wrong, in any great crisis in a man's life, if we look to find the cause lying far back in the past. Far down in the depths of the soul there have been silent, unnoticed stirrings, whisperings; the looking upwards or downwards, the longing for what was forbidden, the tampering with temptation, the giving rein to an evil imagination; then the crisis, the fall, or the rise. The mind had long got habituated to evil, the imagination had been captivated, perchance the reason itself seduced, long before the will consented. When finally the crisis came and you stood face to face with that great temptation, you could not resist it; not because at the moment you did not try, but because your whole nature had for so long a time tampered with it. Or, on the other hand, along with an evil life, in the depths of the nature there sprang up a hope, a desire, and a craving for better things; a gleam in the darkness, the first faint throb of dawn that foretold the coming day. Long years afterwards the crisis came, temptations were met and faced, the will gradually recovered its vigour and you passed

from darkness to light. Old things passed away, in very truth all things are become new. It may indeed be possible for the soul with one mighty effort, aided by the grace of God, to leap out of the darkness into light, for man is by nature more akin to the light than to darkness ; he is created in the Image of the All Holy not of the evil one ; but deterioration must ever be gradual, 'we cannot by one dark plunge sympathise with guilt far beneath us, but gaze at it with recoil, till gradually we fall under the spell of its fascination ; but we are capable of sympathising with moral excellence and purity far above us, so that while the debased may shudder and sicken at the true picture of themselves they can feel the silent majesty of self-denying and disinterested duty.'

It would be a terrible thing were it possible that the discipline and painfully formed habits and the watchfulness of years could give way at any one moment under the stress of temptation without any premonition, any interior relaxation or unfaithfulness preparing the way for such a fall. No, it could not be ; if such were possible we might indeed despair. The law of nature as well as that of grace forbids us to believe it possible ; habit works with as rigorous a law as any of the physical laws of the universe. A great temptation therefore does but disclose what has been passing within the soul it may be for years before. The moment of temptation is not the moment upon which alone victory or failure depends. One may do his utmost to resist in the moment of temptation, while his failure may have been practically a foregone conclusion. If Eve had not been tampering

with the temptation to eat of the forbidden tree for some time previously she could not have fallen. The moral nature had been imperceptibly relaxing its hold upon God long before the crisis came and she fell. When two armies face one another in battle each no doubt does its utmost in the contest, but victory will depend upon the years of drill and discipline that have preceded. Peter's fall was not the result of a moment in which he was off his guard ; it was the outcome of a characteristic defect which we can trace to almost our first knowledge of him, and against which he had been warned by our Lord again and again. Judas's terrible fall was not the result of a moment's great need, or a sudden opportunity presenting itself ; it was the result of a deep-rooted fault in his character that had been left unconquered even while he was in the company of our Lord.

This being the case, it is necessary that we should often look backwards as well as forwards. The cause of our greatest moral danger to-day may not lie in some terrible temptation by which we are at the moment assailed, but in a quiet working of some old habit that has never been entirely broken with. Whether indeed we shall be able to resist the power of the new temptation will probably depend upon the way in which we have been dealing with that old habit.

It is important, therefore, that we should look to the foundations of our character and see that they are sound and secure. We must remember the past. We must not forget that underlying our best self is our worst self ; beneath the converted life is the un-

converted ; behind the twenty years of earnest effort and prayer lie those bad, graceless, undisciplined years of boyhood and youth.

But we must consider further not only the foundations, but where they have been laid ; what relationship exists between the present and the past, between the spiritual life and those reckless years spent apart from God. On what kind of soil have the foundations of your spiritual life been laid ? Our Lord warns His hearers in His first great sermon that some would build, indeed would take His words and build them into their lives, but that they would build without any consideration as to what they were building upon ; they would build upon the sand, on the dried-up bed of the winter torrent. This is the difference to which He draws attention between the two classes of His hearers. Some would lay their foundations upon the rock, others upon the shifting sand. Similarly, He warns us against those who, instead of a deep interior change of character, would cover superficially the savage unchanged nature of the wolf with the sheep's clothing. It is not enough to strive *now* to live a Christian life and to form Christian virtues ; we have to consider into what texture already existing we would weave these graces, upon what kind of soil we would build these hopes. In other words, we cannot leave the past out in considering the present and the future.

And so our Lord said, ' When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room ; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him ; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place ; and thou begin

with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.'

In other words He warns those who are bidden to the great Wedding Feast to begin by taking the lowest place; to begin at the very beginning, not to be impatient or ambitious, or in pride to try at once to rival those who fill the highest places; but to go into the lowest place of penitence and reverence and to tarry there until called up higher by the Giver of the Feast.

The Parable teaches us that there is indeed to be progress, that we are not to be content to remain always in the same spiritual condition, but that the advance is to be an orderly one from first to last. That we must begin at the beginning and go on step by step, as we are called upwards by Him who has given the Feast. The spiritual life in this respect is like the natural life; it is an organic growth—'first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.' As a tree begins in the seed, so the spiritual life must have its proper beginning, taking root downwards and bearing fruit upwards. It will not do, therefore, to begin too high up. There is the work of the lowest place before we can advance to the highest. We have to remove the accumulated rubbish of the past years till we reach the Rock of Christ's Presence within us—that gift of the baptismal life upon which

we may lay with security each stone of the new building.

It is necessary, therefore, at first, to keep ourselves back, to learn the principles of the doctrines of Christ before we go on to perfection, and to 'lay the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God of the doctrines of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.'[1] That is, not merely a moral but a spiritual and doctrinal foundation, learning what we are to do as Christians, and also what we are to believe before we go on into the higher life of more advanced spiritual experiences. Many begin with doing too much. Saying too many prayers, making too frequent communions, taking for granted that they know all that is necessary to know of the faith, giving out constantly to others before they have really learned to rest upon the inexhaustible source of life within themselves—'Christ within them the hope of glory.'

It is a good thing, therefore, when anyone feels his religious life unreal and unstable, when he feels that he has committed himself to more than he is really prepared for, or that he is not spiritually up to the standard of those amongst whom he lives and with whom he works, when he is haunted with the sense of spiritual unreality and uncertainty, when he is conscious that he has never really learnt how to pray, or how to examine his conscience, or how to make a good communion, and that he is hazy and altogether uncertain about his belief in regard to the great

[1] Heb. vi. 1, 2.

doctrines of Christianity, that, for instance, he could not tell what he means when he professes his faith in the last six Articles of the Creed, that he does not know what he ought to believe and what he ought not to believe on some of the great controverted questions of the day, or that he has undertaken to help others in matters in which he needs first to be educated himself; it is a good thing that such a person should ask himself seriously and in the Presence of God whether the cause of all this sense of unreality and uncertainty is not to be found in the fact that when he was called to the Wedding Feast and first heeded the call, in other words at his conversion, he was not content to take the lowest place of penitence and preparation, but pushed forward amongst the guests that were privileged to sit in the highest places. May not his case be another example of the seed that fell on the rocky ground and started up quickly, grew too fast, outgrew its strength, had not roots deep in proportion to its growth, and so, when the sun was up, withered away?—when the crisis came failed; when the man was needed who was well equipped and well prepared for some difficult task he had to step aside and let another take his place. 'Give this man place.'

Often in spiritual things we see this: the clever, shrewd, pushing, energetic, but undisciplined man having to give place to the man not nearly so gifted, but who had worked steadily on in obedience to the leadings of our Lord. However it may be in the world, it is certainly true in spiritual things, that it is steady, patient faithfulness to God's leadings,—'the building that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is

God,' if we may apply these words to the soul,—it is such qualities as these to which natural quickness and brilliancy have in the long run to give way. To such persons it is said again and again, 'Give this man place.' 'They that were ready went into the wedding.' Those who, upon being bidden to the wedding, are content to take the lowest place are called up higher and have honour amongst the assembled guests.

And there is but one remedy our Lord implies in such cases. The person who, through pride or impatience, has pushed himself into a position into which he has not been called must leave it. 'He must begin with shame to take the lowest room;' that is his only hope, but it is a most real hope. Such a one has learned from bitter experience, and he has learned that pride must have a fall. If he has the courage to begin again, to take altogether a humbler position and a humbler line, and to do what he ought to have done, and to learn what he ought to have learnt years ago, he will not regret it. A man who can do that, who, for the sake of being real and thoroughly true, will endure the shame which such a step involves, will eventually have his reward. The giver of the Feast will come to him and say, 'Friend, come up higher; then shall he have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with him.'

But there is another thought suggested rather than developed in this Parable for those whose danger lies in a very different direction from that which we have been considering. There are some timid and untrustful souls who *have* taken the lowest places when first called to the wedding and have never gone

up higher, although they have been called. They have always feared the risk of undertaking what they are not used to, and of getting out of their groove. They are lacking in courage, lacking in the spirit which is ready to make a venture in obedience to the call of God. And such people certainly are in great danger, for there comes a time when a person can no longer remain where he is, but must go on or deteriorate: he has exhausted the nourishment that is to be found where he is at present. 'When I was a child I spake as a child; when I became a man I put away childish things;' the time of childhood comes to an end. There must be growth, movement, development, both inwardly and in the circumstances of one's life. As time goes on it is impossible to cling to the things that were seemly for a child, and therefore there must be advancement. When he that bade you to the wedding calls you up higher, you must go up or eventually be superseded. It will not do always to be content with that amount and kind of prayer which you said as a child—you outgrow such prayers or you say them simply as a superstitious form. The monthly, or even less frequent Communions with which you began your spiritual life twenty years ago, and which then were as much as you were capable of receiving with advantage, will not do now. You will not get what you used to get out of such infrequent Communions, your spiritual nature must grow or its powers will degenerate, and, if you do not take heed, may die of atrophy.

There must, then, on the one hand, be a steady movement upwards, guided by the Voice of Him who

called each to the Wedding Feast, and, on the other hand, the movement must be regular, orderly, like the growth of an organic life, beginning at the lowest place and not content till you have heard the Voice of Him who first called you bid you come to the very highest place, even into the Presence of the Bridegroom Himself.

The Lost Piece of Silver—The Lost Sheep—The Prodigal

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER—THE LOST SHEEP—THE PRODIGAL

'And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

'Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

'And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when

he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found.'—S. Luke xv. 3–32.

XV

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER—THE LOST SHEEP—THE PRODIGAL

ONE of the great works of Revelation is to interpret man to himself. We are ever striving to understand the mystery of our own being, but we are never able to get far beneath the surface; the light that Revelation throws upon the mystery must, if it is true, explain some of those difficulties which we are ever conscious of feeling in our daily experience. The two-fold knowledge coming from two different sources must harmonise in our practical daily life; as we live and study it, we see it from one point of view, in Revelation we see it from another. The light that is given us in Revelation is meant to interpret some of those things which experience knows, but cannot explain.

One of the most common of these experiences is the restlessness of human nature and its dissatisfaction with all earthly things. Men strive for one thing after another, and when it is gained they are not content, they must have more. 'A spark disturbs out clod' and fills us with a feverish restlessness that no earthly remedy seems able to cure.

Now, Holy Scripture interprets this restlessness for us, this unceasing dissatisfaction with what has been acquired. It tells us that man was made for

God; that whatever else he may be, he is above all things a religious being. Its picture of human life is a vivid picture of life such as we know and see it; it is the most intensely human of all books, but behind all its pictures stands one fact interpreting and explaining them all—man cannot get on without God. The fall was a fall from God, all his troubles arise from setting God aside; his only real failure is a spiritual failure, his restoration is a spiritual restoration.

Scripture opens with a picture of man in the peace and joy of a life near to God, then sin enters and disturbs this close relationship which was the secret of all his happiness; the gates of Eden are closed upon man in rebellion against God. Scripture closes with man restored to his peace in the vision of God: 'The Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.'[1] 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.'[2] That is the highest hope that Revelation inspires: that sinful man can return to God. This is the Gospel; the glad tidings of great joy. Between these two pictures of happiness forfeited and happiness restored, is the history of a long, wild, passionate struggle, now in one way, now in another, to get back that happiness which men felt they ought to have; and in the midst of this endless struggle, God

[1] Rev. xxi. 3, 4. [2] *Ibid.* xxi. 7.

is seen striving to make Himself heard and known, sending failure, suffering, dissatisfaction, and calling to him, 'O man, thou wert made for God, and thy heart is restless till thou find thy rest in Him.'

And this appeal of God to man of course reached its climax in the Gospel. There God Himself is revealed, coming to show man the secret of his restlessness and the key to his happiness—'Come unto Me all ye that travail and are heavy laden and I will give you rest;' 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' The veil is lifted up and men are allowed to see Him in Whose love alone they can find rest.

But the Incarnation did more than this: it showed the world that not only was it impossible for it to find rest and true happiness apart from God, but it showed it also that in some mysterious way the Heart of God was restless in its longing for man. If the meaning of all the strange restlessness of human life lay in its unconscious search for God, this restlessness has its counterpart in a mysterious way in the Being of God Himself. If the heart of man was crying out in inarticulate yearnings, 'My soul is athirst for Thee, my flesh also longeth after Thee,' the heart of God cried out, 'How can I give thee up, O Ephraim, how can I deliver thee, O Israel, My heart is moved within Me, My repentings are kindled together.'

This attitude of God towards man the Incarnation did not create, it revealed. It showed God's response to man's unutterable need. What a revelation it was; how different from what men thought! They looked up to Heaven in fear; they sought to assuage the wrath of the offended Deity by the most costly

sacrifices; 'the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul.' They did not know that the God whom they sought merely to propitiate was yearning for their love, nor that the secret object of all their longings was that unknown God Himself.

Now, these two thoughts, while they are constantly brought out in all our Lord's life and teaching, are developed with special beauty in the three parables which follow one another in the fifteenth chapter of S. Luke. They unfold, in an ever-ascending scale of intensity, the deepest mysteries of the life of man and of the Being of God. They are, indeed, the Gospel in epitome. In them man is shown under different forms the secret of his own life, and that which above all things he needs to know and cannot find out for himself about God. These two thoughts run through the three parables, linking them together and bringing out the same great truths in ever-clearer lines: 1. God's need of man; 2. and man's need of God.

1. *a.* In the first Parable, God's tender love towards sinful man is described under the image of a shepherd's care for his wandering sheep. The sheep have passed into the fold, safely housed for the night, and as the shepherd turns homewards he hears the bleating of one sheep straying upon the moors. There is but one thought, he must go after it till he finds it, he cannot leave it to wander and be lost; there is at once the feeling of compassion for its helplessness, it cannot find its way unaided; and the sense of ownership, it belongs to him, he cannot afford to lose it. The sheep straying away further and further from the fold in its vain efforts to return calls out all the care and

compassion in the shepherd's heart; it is the appeal of weakness to strength, of ignorance to knowledge.

Such, says our Lord, is God's feeling towards the sinner. He is moved with compassion; the need and helplessness of the soul appeal to Him, as the helplessness of the sheep to the shepherd. There is no room for anger; only for pity and love. The soul is straying further and further from its true rest, it does not understand that it cannot govern itself and go where it pleases, it cannot believe that its only safety is under the guidance of another wiser than itself; it breaks away from the shepherd and the fold and wanders away in forgetfulness or denial of God. And our Lord says all this wilfulness stirs the Heart of God not to anger but to pity. While man is scorning Him, God has already gone forth to seek him. It is a striking picture: rebellious man taking his life into his own hands, and living in disregard or defiance of God, getting more and more entangled, and hopelessly losing the way of life. And all this, acting but as a great appeal to the Heart of God to help him. His very defiance, his claim of independence, not calling forth anger and judgment, but only moving God to pity. The soul does not know its need of God; still less does it know God's need of it. That undefined sense of helplessness and growing restlessness has its counterpart in the great God Himself; the wanderings of the soul are drawing God after it.

b. In the second Parable the prominent thought is that which lay in the background of the former one: it is the inherent *value* of the soul. The woman who had lost one piece of silver out of ten is the poorer for

the loss; she cannot afford to lose so much; what she has lost is of too much value to herself; she must for her own sake seek for it.

Our Lord would show us in this Parable, that in some mysterious way the soul is of such value in His eyes that He, in a mystery, is Himself the poorer for every soul that is lost. If *we* do not feel any need for God, He does need *us*. What for, we can scarcely form an idea. Our whole history is not disclosed on earth; we only know that with an immense outlay of suffering and trouble God seeks for each lost soul, as the woman for her lost coin. Uninteresting and monotonous as your life may seem, it is of extraordinary interest in the eyes of God. He needs it; He will leave no means untried to regain it. Life is looked upon as a very cheap thing by men on earth; we sell ourselves for very little. Not so with God; anyone of us, the poorest, the most uninteresting, sets Him searching till He finds it.

It has been said, 'Men sometimes seem to suppose that God is not alive to their dangers, but needs to be aroused to take a livelier interest in their condition, and to help them in their strivings against evil. He is thought of as sitting coldly watching our passionate and almost despairing struggles to break away from evil and make our way back to a pure and helpful life, as if He were saying, I will let this sinner learn what it is to have strayed from Me. But it is not so. The initiative is God's, and all that you desire or do in the way of return to righteousness is prompted by Him.' We may not be moved by the thought of God's compassion; well, then, He appeals to our self-

esteem. 'Even in your pride,' He seems to say, 'you do not set high enough value upon yourself; you are of more worth than you imagine; your failure is My loss.' The Treasury of God is impoverished by the sin of man.

Here, then, we are shown that God comes forth to seek man, not merely out of compassion for his folly, but because He is Himself the poorer if He fails to recover him. The thought in this Parable is in advance of the other; the appeal to man implied in it is stronger, and based upon higher grounds.

c. In the third Parable the leading thought is God's personal love for the soul. 'Yea, even like as a Father pityeth His own children.' Our Lord reveals to us the love and longing of God for the soul that has turned away from Him, under the most touching image of human affection. It is, as it were, God's appeal to man for mercy. He tells us that it is He Himself who suffers by the sinner's heartless disregard of Him. The son does not perceive that he is breaking his father's heart by his wilfulness and neglect of him. As love always gives an unbounded power to the one who is the object of affection, so the fact of God's necessary love for man puts God, so to speak, in man's power. As the reckless, spendthrift son can bring his father's life down with sorrow to the grave, so in a mysterious way have we a similar power to cause grief to God. The deeper the love, the greater the power that is put into the loved one's hands, and God has put this power into the hands of each of us; because He loves us we can make Him suffer. And what suffering is so keen as that of meeting with disregard, contempt, indifference from the loved one.

Such is the leading thought in this, the greatest of the Parables, the Parable of which all the others are but as the setting. It reverses all our preconceived ideas ; it is not we who cry in vain to God, but God who cries to us ; we are enjoying ourselves in heartless indifference of the pain which we are causing Him. It is not God who will not be entreated, but we who turn away from Him whose love has made Him our suppliant.

Nothing can exceed the high estimate that man must form of the dignity of his own life, if he grasps what our Lord teaches in this Parable of his power in some mysterious but very real way to give sorrow or joy to God Himself.

These three Parables thus show us in an ascending scale of intensity God's care for the soul that He has created. His compassion for it, His estimate of its value, and His personal love drawing Him to come forth in search for it.

2. But they also show man's need of God. They picture in various ways man's unhappiness and powerlessness when separated from God.

a. In the first Parable the soul is represented under the image of a lost sheep. The sheep is the type of the most utter helplessness and dependence, without the shepherd's care it cannot live. The Parable depicts the sheep wandering from the fold in search of food, and at last perceiving that it has lost its way. It cannot return by itself, its helpless efforts lead it further from the fold ; it can but cry out in its need, not knowing to whom it cries, its cry is but the instinctive utterance of its helplessness. It may be that it is crying out only

for its companions from whom it has strayed. But that cry is heard and understood by the shepherd; he knows that the sheep, though *it* knows not, is crying in truth for him, and that it is not its companions, but he alone who can lead it to the fold.

A sheep wandering on the moors, alarmed by its solitude, wakening the mountains with its cries, lost and alone, such, says our Lord, is the soul that has awakened to the consciousness that it has lost God. It has strayed away in thoughtlessness. There has been no deliberate breach with God, no moment of open rupture, it has simply thought of other things and strayed on intent only upon the moment's enjoyment. It does not realise its danger, or how far it is wandering, till it wakens up to find that it has lost the fold, lost the shepherd, lost itself.

Thus sin and complete separation from God may begin in mere thoughtlessness. There is another aspect of sin, indeed, brought out in the third Parable—a deliberate act of rebellion, an open rupture between the soul and God; but this Parable would show us that sin may begin in a thoughtless wandering from the right path, without any malicious intention, that the soul may get carried further and further away by the moment's attraction, till it wakens to find that it has lost God. It had not thought of rebellion, it was only influenced by the desire to satisfy its wants, but it ends in complete separation from Him who is the soul's protector. It has not, like the Prodigal, sunk into the degradation of grievous sin, and gone down to the level of the swine, but it is as far away from its true home, and as little able to satisfy its

deepest wants. If it were left to itself it would not be long before it, too, must cry out 'I perish with hunger;' wandering away, attracted by the pleasant pasture, it ends in starvation.

For when it has wakened up to realise that it has lost God, it cannot find the way back, its helpless efforts carry it further from Him; it finds that it has, in truth, lost its way, lost the way of prayer, lost the path of discipline, lost the light of faith. It knows not how to return; the shepherd must come and seek it.

Many a soul that has found itself in such a hopeless and helpless state of separation from God can trace its condition, not to deliberate and malicious sin, but to carelessness, lack of self-restraint, the thoughtless seeking after pleasure. But, however it comes about, the Parable describes in eloquent words the utter helplessness of the soul that has lost God. To lose God is to lose itself, to lose its own way.

b. In the second Parable the soul is represented under the image of a piece of silver which has fallen from the hand of the woman to whom it belongs, and is lost.

In this Parable one special point seems to be the utter uselessness of the piece of silver when it has been lost by its owner; its value remains unimpaired, but it needs to be in the possession of its owner to be of any use. It is of no use to itself apart from her, it has no power to develop its own usefulness, nor can it understand its own worth. It lies upon the floor of the house of no use to anyone, though it is of such value that if only it were lifted up and restored to its

owner it would be at once a source of wealth, not only to the mistress of the house, but to the whole household, its value could be expended upon its adornment. While it lies on the floor of the house the whole household is the poorer for its loss, though the fact of its being lost can in no way affect its intrinsic worth.

And it can do nothing towards its own restoration; it can but wait till it is found and lifted up from the dust and restored to its owner's hands—verily, it has no power of itself to help itself.

And, as with the piece of silver, so with the soul—when it falls from the Hand of God it is at once drawn to the earth. The force of the earth's attraction at once draws it down, and in itself it has no power to resist it, it needs another force to counteract the attraction earthward. It falls by its own weight, like any material thing, under the power of that all-pervading force. The woman's hand can hold it up and use it; the gentle pressure of her hand, which seems like a caress rather than a force, counteracts that tremendous power that is unceasingly operating, to draw all things to itself. Even while the coin is held by the woman that force is acting, but it is not felt, for the gentle grasp of her hand protects it.

Thus does the unprotected soul fall under the all-attracting spell of the world if it escapes for a moment from the Personal care of God. 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.' It was never intended to stand alone, it was made to be used by another. The moment it escapes from that other's care, it falls

earthward, the two forces pull in opposite directions, the earth draws downward, the woman's hand draws up. The coin can but yield itself to one or other, it cannot hold itself up ; if for a moment it escape from the hand of her who holds it, it is conscious at once of being seized by, and held in, the embrace of mighty and irresistible currents that bear it downward.

And once down, it is powerless to rise, the pressure upon it is overwhelming. It lies there, whether by its own weight or by some external spell that paralyses all motion, it cannot tell. There it must wait till the power that, to all appearance, with such consummate ease negatives this tremendous force shall lift it up again.

And no sooner does it fall than it begins to lose its lustre ; it is not in its proper place, the dust, and grime, and things of earth gather upon it and tarnish it so that it can no longer be recognised as having any value.

How many a soul has thus fallen from God's care and keeping, and lies powerless beneath the spell of that mysterious attraction that holds it down, and paralyses every effort to rise—the power of the world. There it lies getting more tarnished, less capable of being recognised every day, all its power of being of any use suspended. What might it not do if only it would allow God to use it? So far as God is concerned it is lost, yet still, however completely it may be lost, it can lose nothing of its intrinsic value, and the knowledge of its value sets the woman to work to seek for it. The most earth-stained and earth-bound sinner is still of infinite value in the Eyes of God.

So sin wresting the soul from the hand of God who owns it, casts it to the earth, and incapacitates it from fulfilling its proper functions. The imagery of this Parable shows more deeply than the last, man's need of God. The lost piece of money is more helpless and in a more hopeless condition than the lost sheep.

c. In the third Parable we are shown man deliberately breaking away from the restraints of his father's home, and taking his life into his own hands without regard to his father's will. He begins with a dream of liberty, and ends a slave. He begins by taking all his possessions into his own hands, and ends a beggar.

In the two former Parables the beginning of sin is not traced to a deliberate act of rebellion against God, or to an open rupture with Him. The sheep wanders thoughtlessly in search of pasture, and loses its way. The coin falls from the woman's hand and gets lost. Doubtless an entire separation from God does often begin in such ways, but these would be far from giving a complete picture of the way in which man loses God and loses himself. In this parable the son makes up his mind to leave his father's house. He said to his father, 'Give me the portion of goods that falleth unto me.' 'Give me my life and my powers into my own hands that I may make what I can of them ; I do not want to be dependent on thee, I can manage things better for myself.' He would go into a far country, out of reach of his father's interference and plans for him, and live his life according to his own views. Doubtless he had no intention of doing anything unworthy of himself,

he did not mind doing what might be unworthy of his father.

And our Lord shows us that a life planned and lived thus, may end on a level with the beasts. Man refusing to recognise the paternal control of his father, will find himself eventually unable to control himself. There are forces in his nature, when loosed from the restraints of obedience to God, the strength of which he cannot measure; they break loose and enslave the will which refuses to submit to its true Master. He who began life with the determination to follow the free impulses of his own desires and to recognise no restraints but those of his own will, when he had indulged himself to the full, awoke to the sense of his misery, crying, 'How many hired servants of my Father have enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.'

It would be impossible to draw a picture more true to life than that which is drawn in this Parable, showing the contrast between youth in its gay thoughtlessness and perfect self-confidence certain of its own unfailing resources and self-sufficiency, and the man of mature years, weighed down with bitter experience, disappointed with himself and crushed with the sense of failure, utterly powerless to recover himself, sinking into deeper degradation, yet crying out in self-condemnation and remorse. He sees all creation rejoicing while he is miserable. All other forms of life—the servants in his Father's house—having enough and to spare, while he perishes with hunger.

Such is the end of a life of independence, a life

lived without any thought of its true purpose, the Will of God. Man beginning by breaking loose from all the restraints of his father's house, ends by longing to be readmitted if only as a hired servant. He cannot govern himself, he ever needs something, and at last, often too late, he awakens to realise that what he needs is God.

In the two former Parables the images that are employed lead the mind to dwell upon the helplessness and powerlessness of the soul to return to God when separated from Him. He is incapable of doing anything in regard to his own salvation, he can but wait till God seeks, finds, and restores. In the first Parable he is crying out, 'I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost, oh, seek Thy servant.' In the second, 'My soul cleaveth unto the dust, oh, quicken Thou me.' This is one side. 'We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves.' 'No man can quicken his own soul.'

This is one side, but the third Parable brings out in all its fulness the other side—the action of the will, the resolve to return. 'I will arise.' The three together show us the two sides of S. Paul's paradox, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'[1] If we were only to read the first two Parables, we should say at once that everything in regard to the salvation of the sinner is done by God—that man has nothing to do. If we were to read the last Parable only, we should conclude that nothing is done by God, but that man

[1] Phil. ii. 13, 14.

himself does everything. The three must be taken together, one supplementing the other, then we learn that God is supreme, and that man is free; that God saves us, and yet that every moment we must accept or reject the salvation He offers; that God seeks, finds, restores, and yet that we must ourselves consciously and actively return to Him, or we never shall be restored at all. Thus, then, the three Parables bring out ever more and more clearly on the one side God's need of man, and on the other, man's need of God.

The Prodigal and his Brother

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER

'A certain man had two sons : and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat : and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat, and be merry : for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick

and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.'—S. Luke xv. 11–32.

XVI

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER

BESIDES the leading thought in each of our Lord's Parables, we constantly find, as we might expect in words so deep, much instruction in some less prominent feature of the Parable; indeed, it occasionally happens that the central thought is set in a cluster of lesser Parables which gather round it or grow out of it.

Such is the case in the Parable of the Prodigal. There is a vast treasury of instruction in the details and lesser incidents of the Parable subsidiary to its great central thought.

Let us consider one of them.

The Parable speaks of two sons. According to the strictest interpretation of the words of the Parable, these two sons can scarcely be meant to represent the Jew and the Gentile. The sons were, both of them, in their father's house; they had an equal share in the blessings and the discipline of the home. Their knowledge of their father, their relations to him, and their privileges, were identical.

There is not in all this the contrast which we should look for, if the Parable were describing those who were within and those who were without the Covenant. Both were within, their blessings and their responsibilities were the same.

They represent, rather, two types of character that are always to be found amongst those who live in their father's house within the covenant of grace.

1. First, there is the Elder Brother. He is the type of those who always have been and always will remain contented within the limits of their Father's home. He has no desire to leave it. His temptations do not draw him into that great and unknown world which lies outside. It has no special attraction for him. His interests, his affections, and consequently his temptations lie within the sphere of his father's house. It is for him at once his world and his home. His life and his hopes are centred there.

2. And then there is the Younger Brother. He is the type of those whose eyes instinctively and almost from the first turn outward to that great unknown world of mystery that lies so near and yet so far from his father's home. He feels within himself capacities that suit him for that free, fascinating, and adventurous life. He chafes against the narrowness and the limitations under which he is compelled to live. He must be up and away, and active. He cannot be happy and contented at home like his brother. The surroundings are uncongenial. Things look small, and mean, and poor compared with the possibilities he feels within him for life in the world outside.

These two men are born and brought up under the same circumstances; they have had the same opportunities, the same discipline, the same love and care from their father, yet how different the effect. The elder finds his home in his father's house. He has no

desire to leave it. The younger never has been able to look upon it as his home. The things that his brother loved were to him contemptible. What his brother considered peace he characterised as dulness. The interests that filled his brother's life appeared to him narrow and stifling. There was a lack of masculine force in the employment and doings of the life at home that he felt sure was to be found in the life outside, and so in the spirit of defiance and opposition he closed his heart against the surroundings of his life, and spoke with contempt of all that his brother held most dear.

So it was from the first, and the contrast only became more marked as the years went by. There is a fundamental difference of temperament, though as yet neither character is in any sense developed, yet from the beginning they are separated in tastes and interests.

It would seem, however, that there was no merit in the fact of the Elder Brother's love for his home ; it was his natural disposition. And it could scarcely be called a fault for which the younger was responsible that his inclinations should lead him to desire things which his home could not supply. It was with him, also, the result of a natural disposition for which he was not responsible.

No, there was neither merit nor fault in the *mere* inclinations of either. Religious tastes do not necessarily make a man good, any more than a natural distaste for religion necessarily makes a man bad. But these differences of disposition showed at the very outset that the two lives would be very different

both in their probation and development. The one is doomed to a more difficult life than the other. He has within himself characteristics that must necessarily involve a terrible conflict if he is to remain dutiful to his father; though, no doubt, the Elder Brother is not without his difficulties also. The all-important question is, how will these two men of such different natural dispositions act under the circumstances that are to test them?

Consider, first, the Younger Brother. He is brought before us in the Parable at a crisis in his life. It is the moment in which, no doubt, after a long period of restlessness and discontent, he makes up his mind to take his life into his own hands and leave his father's home. Such a decision was, we may believe, the last act of a long period of interior conflict. A breach with all that is best and noblest in life could not be the outcome of a moment's discontent. Rather it was the necessary result of years of dissatisfaction and complaining. A wrong habit of mind long indulged in must eventually formulate itself in an outward act of sin.

The Parable does not delineate for us the years of inner revolt and rebellion against the circumstances of life. It shows us the man at the moment when the will is ripe for action. The spirit of rebellion and discontent that might have been overcome by self-discipline is now triumphant; his present life becomes intolerable to him, his mind is made up, he must go. He says to his father, 'Give to me the portion of goods that falleth unto me.'

Thus it ever happens. The constant yielding to

the spirit of discontent with one's life as it is, and the looking out towards and longing for another life that appeals to the lower rather than to the higher side of one's nature, leads at last to a course of action which a short time before would have seemed impossible. It becomes indeed, not only possible, but necessary. Where one is separated from one's surroundings in everything except the body, the body will at last be forced to follow whither heart, and mind, and will have already gone. The son who allowed his imagination and desires to delight in the dreams of the Prodigal's life, cannot stay in his father's house; it is only a question of how soon the outward breach must follow upon the inward alienation.

But if the conduct of the son is unworthy, the action of the father is certainly surprising. The son says to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth unto me, and he divided unto them his living.'

We are not told that he used any persuasion with his son. He asked for his portion, and his father gave it to him. This appears strange when we remember whom this father is intended to represent. Would not an earthly father have tried to persuade his son to remain, or even have refused to grant his request, knowing what the end must be? Perhaps so, but the Heavenly Father is wiser. There would be no gain in holding his son back from what he desired, against his will. He had now gone too far to find happiness where he ought to have found it. He could get no good, nothing but increasing

evil, from staying longer in his father's house. Let him go.

For it is possible that a time may come when it may be less ruinous to the character to do wrong and experience all the suffering and misery which sin involves, than to live on indulging constantly the desire to do the wrong which one is held back from only through fear or compulsion.

There are, I believe, many men and women who have sinned deeply, and brought upon themselves shame and misery, who are not really as corrupt as others who live in the inward indulgence of the worst desires and passions from the actual gratification of which they are held back only through cowardice—a refined selfishness. There may come the moment in the lives of certain people when it is not a virtue to refuse to yield to sin. When the heart has become corrupt and the will is in revolt, the father will not hold back his son from that experience which now appears to be the only possible way of restoring to him that love for himself and his home which he has forfeited. He said unto him, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me, and he divided with them his living.'

The Prodigal is the type of a class of persons who apparently can only learn the reality of the love of God and the power of religion through the bitter experience of the failure and sin which come through separation from Him. The intense attraction which an undisciplined life presents to certain minds can only be dispelled by a personal experience of the misery which such a life really entails. To some

men religion seems narrow and belittling compared with the broader ways of the world, and they are not conscious of any need of God's assistance. The pathway of self-discipline looks like self-consciousness, and the world and its ways look broad and free. It is useless to tell such men that they are mistaken, that what looks so attractive has no real power of satisfying the nature, that it soon brings satiety, dissatisfaction, hunger; that a bitter slavery is hidden under the appearance of freedom. They will not believe such warnings. If they are shown that other men who have broken away from the restraints of religion, and followed their own desires, have ended in degradation and misery, they answer that others may have done so, but that they will not. No, such men are to all appearance lacking in a sense which can only be developed under the pressure of great moral failure. The only thing that can teach them the need of God is the knowledge learned by experience that they cannot control themselves. Enslaved under the dominion of a sin which they hate and cannot conquer, they learn at last that God can be their helper; and in the depths of degradation, with every shred of liberty lost, there begins to dawn upon the soul the vision of the Father's house so long despised.

So in the Parable, the father saw that his son had made up his mind to go, that to refuse would only be to restrain him physically, in heart and interests he had already gone. So he gave to him what he demanded, 'the portion of goods that fell to him'—his natural gifts and endowments, to use as he would

without any consideration of his father's will or the restraints of his father's house. His life henceforth was to be free, to be governed by no consideration but his own pleasure.

Then followed the terrible experiences of life. The world that looked so bright, so full of great possibilities, disappointed him when he came into real contact with it. His liberty, for which he had yearned when in his father's home, he found himself unable to use as freely and as easily as he had imagined. He discovered that there were forces in his nature the power of which he had never calculated, and that they had a tendency to become imperious in their demands and tyrannous when the demands were yielded to. The very freedom of his life tended in a most unaccountable way to slavery. He perceived that that very impulse that drove him forth from his father's house was the chief source of danger to him in life. It was the early manifestation—if only he had known it—of a character too facile and impulsive, which, above all things, needed the discipline and supports of religion to counteract the power of life's attraction. But who could have taught him that? He would not have believed anyone who had told him. No, he can only learn it by his own experience, and his experience altogether disillusioned him. Those years in the far country, a great way off from the companionship and sympathies of his father's house, led to a great reaction and complete overturning of the conception of life which he had formed in his youth. That home that had once seemed so narrow and constrained, now appeared to him the

abode of peace and true liberty—the liberty of a rule whose principle was love. He, the slave of a master who sent him to feed his swine, wondered how he could have rebelled against the loving rule of his father. The contrast between what he had given up, and what he had gained in its place, stood out vividly and bitterly, and at last compelled him to face the difficulties and the humiliation of a return. 'How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father.'

And so he arose and journeyed back, and was received by his father with joy and feasting. Yet though his father embraced him and restored him to all the privileges of sonship, though he had learned what he had never before experienced, his father's love, and the peace and blessedness of his home, nevertheless that past, through which he had learnt to love what once he had despised, could never be forgotten. He could never be as his Elder Brother who had not left his home. He had memories that must haunt him, a knowledge of evil and a fear of temptation unknown to his brother. There were times when the old passions would rise with such force that it would seem almost impossible to restrain them; hours when the cravings for the wild license of the past would return upon him with all their dark horror of revolt against the discipline under which alone he knew he could be safe. Ah, yes. This poor Prodigal could only learn to appreciate the value and the power of religion through failure and sin, but verily it was a heavy price to pay. For though

the grace of God can repair the ravages of sin, and the soul can, through penitence, attain to the place in heaven which it had forfeited by sin, yet on earth the penitent can never be as the innocent ; and even in the peace and joy of the restoration to his father's home, the dark memories of the past return to haunt and to disturb.

But the Elder Brother who had not left, and who probably had never had a wish to leave his father's home, had he no dangers to encounter, no lessons to learn ? Has all gone smoothly with him ? Because it was natural to his temperament to stay at home, was he therefore so shielded that he could not fail ? Surely not. There is no place on earth so sheltered that those who dwell there are secure from all temptation. It lies within the power of everyone to draw good or evil out of the surroundings and circumstances of life, be they ever so dangerous or ever so holy. And certainly the life lived within the father's house by one whose natural inclination leads him to choose such a life has its dangers. There is the danger of narrowness and hardness, of severity in judging sins to which one is not tempted oneself, of setting up tests and standards based upon one's own narrow experience. There is the danger of positive lack of charity and of becoming self-engrossed. It is no easy task to escape from the dangers of any life that is in accordance with one's tastes and inclinations, and this difficulty is not lessened, but increased when one's interests and occupations are concerned with religious things. For it is possible to live as selfish and self-centred a life in the Father's house as the Prodigal

did who devoured his living with harlots. He who lives amidst all the sacred surroundings of religion, but does not rise through them and by means of them to the Personal God, must needs deteriorate under them, in a different way, it is true, but as really as the Prodigal. His character becomes cramped, wooden, unsympathetic, irresponsive.

And this was the case with the Elder Brother, he could not enter into his father's joy at his brother's return, he was out of sympathy with both his father and his brother. He was not moved by the fact that a weight was lifted from his father's heart. He thought only of himself, and looked on the whole scene with jealous eyes and bitterness in his heart.

Life verily had its effect upon him too, and left its mark. He need not have been narrow and jealous and unappreciative. Had he been quite true to all the privileges of his father's house, and lived in close sympathy with the all-embracing love of his father's heart, he could not have been so; but apparently he had not done this. He failed in his way as his brother failed in his. And his failure brings to light just that temper that shows he had not been making the best of his life and his privileges.

The one, breaking away from all religious associations, fell into terrible sin; the other, abiding in his father's house, failed in just those ways in which we find people whose lives are spent amidst religious surroundings, and who are not thoroughly in earnest, are apt to fail.

The Unjust Steward

THE UNJUST STEWARD

'There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?'—S. Luke xvi. 1–12.

XVII

THE UNJUST STEWARD

THE New Testament teaches us both by word and example what the Christian character should be. Our Lord came 'to be unto us an example of godly life.' In all difficulties we look to Him as an unfailing guide. What He did was always the best and the most perfect. The Old Testament taught by precepts—'Thou shalt, thou shalt not.' It went into minute details as regards religious and social life, and its followers felt the burden of the law, and many of them got entangled in its meshes. It could not make the comers thereunto perfect.

Christ came, and instead of precepts and prohibitions there stood before men a living Person, and He summed up all that the Law had said, and a great deal more, in a few words, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give unto the poor, and come and follow Me!'[1] Christ stood before men and won their hearts, and as, loving Him, they sought to be like Him, they became transformed. They had not to ask themselves under different circumstances, 'What is written?' 'What is commanded?' but 'What would this Person, whom I love above all, have done under these same circumstances?' He set men free from the Law, though He brought them under a far

[1] S. Matt. xix. 21.

stricter and more searching law, by winning their love. As they loved the Lawgiver, all the burden of obedience was removed.

What a difference there is between the character and spirit of the Jew striving to obey a law written upon tables of stone, and a Christian obeying the law of Jesus Christ. The Jew finds himself face to face with precepts that never change, that were written down once for all upon the tables of stone, as cold, as hard, as unbending as the stone upon which they were written, 'This do and ye shall live.' There was nothing personal, no touch of sympathy, no power of adaptability. If they failed it frowned upon them in its coldness and condemned them. They could not make terms with it, they could not induce it to bend to any special considerations of difficulty, or temperament, or weakness. 'By the Law is the knowledge of sin.' [1]

How different from all this is the condition of the Christian. The Lawgiver Himself comes down amidst all the circumstances of human life and lives out the law in all its perfection. He goes before, showing the way, and bids us follow Him, and as our love for Him grows stronger we find that the Law, indeed, penetrates more searchingly into the recesses of the heart and mind, to rule and discipline and cleanse them, but our personal love for Him makes all easy. The Christian finds His law possessed of all that power of adaptability and adjustment and elasticity that arises from its being set before him in the form of a personal life rather than upon tables of stone.

[1] Rom. iii. 20.

'The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.'[1] The old law was the letter, written and unchangeable, it killed. The new law revealed itself in a living character, and it giveth life.

And as we study His Character and read His words we can have no doubt what kind of character the Christian's should be. We may explain away words, but we cannot explain away character. He stood forth before the world a new Revelation. He brought to light a new side of our nature, never, or but dimly, seen before. He set before us a new class of virtue, and pointed out the principle of evil lurking in the most unexpected places. He laid down certain ruling principles that were to govern and to form the Christian character, and in His own sacred Person He showed those principles at work. 'Jesus began both to do and to teach.'[2] His teaching was, to a certain extent, a Revelation of His own inner Life. As those who lived nearest to Him heard the Sermon on the Mount, they would know that He was putting into words what they had seen Him pourtray in action.

And His Character and His teaching might be summed up in one word, as, being above everything else, unworldly. 'Let this mind be in you,' says the Apostle, 'which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the Form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in the fashion of a man, He humbled Himself.'[3] 'Love not the world,'

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 6. [2] Acts i. 1. [3] Phil. ii. 5-8.

said the Apostle who leant upon His Breast at the Last Supper, 'neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him.'[1] There is no Christian virtue all through the Gospels that does not help to add some deeper tone to this the chief and most marked feature of His Character. Each one of the Beatitudes is but another, and yet another, development of the unworldly spirit. They begin with that virtue which most separates men from the world, and they end with the world's antagonism formulated in violence and persecution.

Step by step, as the Christian life develops, it is marked by an advance in the spirit of unworldliness.

As our Lord's teaching advances we see in a hundred different ways this same spirit is inculcated. Heavenly-mindedness, the love of God, must beget unworldliness; and conversely, those who give up more and more of what nourishes the worldly spirit will become more heavenly-minded. 'Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also.'[2] 'If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.'[2] 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.'[3]

No person can carry out such precepts literally and have much of the spirit of the world left in him; and, indeed, if any person does live true to these

[1] 1 John ii. 15. [2] S. Matt. v. 39, 40. [3] S. Matt. v. 44.

doctrines of Christ, the world will have very little to say to him.

And in our Lord's own Life we see these principles lived out to the letter. It would seem, as we study it, that it was the impersonation of all that we characterise as most unworldly. Before He had begun His public ministry He faced and overcame the temptation to bend the knee to the world spirit to save Himself from the shame and humiliation of His Passion; and we see Him afterwards alienate the multitudes by the standard He set before them; escape and hide Himself when they sought to make Him a king, refuse peremptorily to make use of any of those arts that secure popularity. The only hold He cared to establish over His followers is a spiritual hold. His Kingdom must have the free air of Heaven breathing through it; there shall, at any rate in its foundation, be no taint of the spirit or ways of the world.

All the Christian virtues help to engender this spirit, humility, patience, simplicity, penitence, mortification. As these deepen in the soul it seals it with the stamp of unworldliness that is unmistakable.

But such a spirit of unworldliness is not so simple a thing as at first sight it seems. Is it to spring from a contempt of all the concerns of life, and are Christians, the more they imbibe the spirit of the Gospel, to regard with more utter scorn the welfare of the world and of all that is around them? It would seem to be undeniable that the spirit which bids a man if his enemy smote him upon the cheek turn to him the other, or if he take his coat to let him have his cloak

also, it would seem that such a spirit must be in irreconcilable opposition to the spirit of competition, upon which all life in this world is based.

Would, then, our Lord, by His teaching the spirit of unworldliness, train His followers in a school in which, so far as the things of this life are concerned, and the dealings with men, they must of necessity be wholly unpractical? Is the perfection of the spirit of Christ one which leads a man to be unbusinesslike, unmethodical in the practical concerns of life, behind the times—so far indeed behind that he is wholly out of touch with them—a person who can be readily tricked by those shrewder men whose characters have been formed under the strain of competition? Is he one who is so absorbed in the loftier thoughts of the Christian aim that when he comes down from his prayers into the streets and thoroughfares, or is obliged to deal with the hard facts of the practical world, he is simply at the mercy of those who if they know nothing of prayer know a great deal about the value of money, and have a quick and unerring way of measuring the men they have to deal with? Did our Blessed Lord intend to place in this practical world an organised body of men whose attitude towards it was to be one of contempt and incompetency, who were to be always at its mercy, never able to deal with it upon its own terms, wholly ignorant of all its concerns, because their citizenship was in Heaven?

We have but to put the question to know what the answer must be. It could not be so. We know that the Church was commissioned to take care of the bodies as well as the souls of men; we know that the

first Deacons were ordained in order to relieve the Apostles of some of the pressure of business details, serving tables. In the Apostolic college itself one of the Twelve was the keeper of the purse. Whatever, therefore, our Lord's teaching on the spirit of unworldliness may mean, and, as we have seen, it penetrates all His teaching, it certainly cannot mean imprudence in the practical concerns of life, incompetence to deal with business matters, recklessness in regard to the use and expenditure of money. The unworldliness of the Christian cannot be meant to leave him at the mercy of every clever rogue, nor can we imagine that the more saintly a Christian is the more he is exposed to the chances of being made a fool of.

At the same time it cannot be denied that the formation of the specially Christian virtues and the revelation of faith would have, and as a matter of fact does have, a tendency to lead certain minds to under-estimate the importance of the affairs of life.

The Christian life and those virtues which are distinctively Christian are so nicely balanced that it is very easy for them if over-pressed, however slightly, on one side or the other to lose their balance, and consequently for the person who strives to cultivate them to find that his life has somehow become one-sided. We know as a matter of fact that some religious persons use language about the Christian's relation to this world that is exaggerated and untrue; and it is more than likely that a person in the ardour of the first awakening to the life of faith and the realisation of things unseen will do things and say

things about the concerns of earth that are unjustifiable and unreal. It is not easy to keep the balance between the claims of this world and the next. And it is very natural, however wrong, that one who has been for years engrossed in temporal affairs, and never given a thought to eternity, on awakening to the realities of the other world should rush to the other extreme and neglect as altogether unworthy of his consideration the things that belong to them.

It is an accusation not uncommonly brought against religious people that they are unpractical and lacking in common sense, and that a man is a bad man of business in proportion as he is a good Christian.

And while acknowledging a certain amount of truth in such an accusation, and recognising that with certain types of character such a danger undeniably does exist, we cannot but perceive at once that our Lord's teaching from first to last provides the remedy against the danger, and that this great defect could only exist in the case of one who pressed certain sayings of our Lord to the neglect of others. The whole idea of our life on earth being a stewardship should make Christians feel their responsibility for all that is entrusted to them ; the most material things of life are given to us in trust, and we are responsible for their use and expenditure. The Christian who has grasped this doctrine must feel himself bound to cultivate such gifts as would enable him to put to the best use all that his Master has committed to his care. He would indeed find our Lord utter a very vigorous protest against any such low view of his responsibility

in regard to material things in His condemnation of the conduct of the man with one talent: 'Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.'[1]

The spirit of unworldiness, then, as inculcated in the teaching of our Lord, should not, if His teaching is taken as a whole, and one part balanced with another, and as a matter of fact, does not lead His most devout followers to neglect the cultivation of all that vast array of gifts which enable men to manage well the affairs of life, and which equip them for dealing with men in the concerns of business.

Indeed, He has left us in no doubt about the matter, for He spoke one Parable for the express purpose of pressing upon His followers the necessity of cultivating such gifts. He teaches it in the most startling, and, if we might say so reverently, the most daring way.

Following immediately upon the greatest and most spiritual of all the Parables, the Parable of the Prodigal, comes the Parable of the Unjust Steward. In this Parable our Lord points His followers to a clever rogue, and says to them, 'You Christians can learn a lesson from such a man as that.'

'The man's deed has two aspects: one, that of its dishonesty, upon which it is most blameworthy; the other, its prudence, its foresight, upon which, if not particularly praiseworthy, it yet offers a sufficient *analogon* to a Christian virtue—one which *should be* abundantly, but *is* only too weakly found in most

[1] S. Matt. xxv. 26, 27.

followers of Christ—to draw from it an exhortation and rebuke to others; just as any other deeds of bold, bad men have a side, that, namely, of their boldness and decision, on which they rebuke the doings of the weak and vacillating good. We may disentangle a bad man's energy from his ambition, and contemplating them apart may praise the one and blame the other. Exactly so our Lord disentangles here the steward's dishonesty from his foresight; the one can only have His earnest rebuke, the other may be useful for the provoking of His people to a like prudence employed about things of a far higher and a more lasting nature.'[1]

Here is a man displaying great talents, clever, resourceful, able to turn everything to account, with his wits about him, ready for any emergency, full of energy and capacity, quick to take in the whole position and rapid in coming to a decision in a crisis. These were not his faults, they were his gifts; and great gifts they are, always meriting praise. The fault was the using such powers for a base and selfish end. But why should not these gifts be used for a good end? If the will of such a man as this unjust steward could be won for Christ, if he could be led to bring all these trained habits of business and natural wit to lay them at His Feet, instead of using them for such unworthy ends, what service he could render to His Kingdom, and what a character would be his!

'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' The children of

[1] Trench, *Notes on the Parables*, in loco.

light do not lay sufficient store upon such gifts. Let them learn from this unscrupulous but clever thief that the talents he is using for destruction may be used for edification.

Our Lord thus refers His followers to a class of persons whose gifts there is a tendency with some of them to despise, and He points out that there is a good deal in such a man that deserves imitation. The training that even an irreligious man gets in the world is not to be ignored. It is in itself, so far as it goes, good. The effect of such dicipline and competition is to produce great gifts which would prove of incalculable service to the Children of Light. The supernatural graces of the Christian do not do away with the need of the natural virtues of the man. The grace of God and hours of prayer will not enable us to keep our accounts right unless we take the trouble to learn book-keeping. The zeal of S. Paul or the asceticism of S. Anthony will not dispense with the necessity of paying our bills and answering our letters. Indeed we might be pardoned for doubting if such zeal and asceticism were not rather forms of self-deception if the ordinary duties of life were neglected. Yet there is no doubt the danger of setting such store upon the supernatural graces as to lead to the neglect or the slighting of the natural. The one can never atone for the neglect of the other. 'These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.'[1] Those who are like Peter on the house-top, wrapped in heavenly visions, must answer to the knock at the door, the intrusion of the practical life of action if

[1] St. Matt. xxiii. 23.

they are ever to understand the full meaning of their visions—unless, of course, in the case of those who are called apart from the outward life of action by a special vocation.

The Parable, then, is meant to correct the mistake of those who realising very highly the value of the supernatural virtues are in danger of slighting the natural.

But it corrects a further aggravation of this mistake which is not uncommon, the supposition, namely, that certain practical business habits must take some of the lustre off heaven-born virtues. Indeed it goes much further; it bids us, on the authority of our Lord Himself, balance the spiritual side—if I may so call it—of the Christian virtues by the practical.

Humility is no doubt a great Christian grace, but if humility unmans a person and makes him incapable of holding his place with men, it is a spurious humility. Humility is quite compatible with unyielding determination in the affairs of this life as truly as of the other. The Christian does not compromise his humility in the slightest degree by holding his own in matters of business, nor does it prevent him from taking a proper estimate of the men he has to deal with. Meekness is one of the special characteristics of our Lord in which He called upon all His followers to imitate Him; but meekness is not a timid yielding of judgment and place to every comer. If there never was one so meek as our Lord, there never was one more unyielding in matters of right and wrong, never one whose words and bearing were less timid. Meekness, therefore, does not unnerve a man or

expose him to being made the dupe of every unscrupulous person he has to deal with. Heavenly-mindedness enables one to despise the riches of this world, but this does not mean that it makes a man ignorant of the value of money ; on the contrary, the person who holds his heart aloof from earthly possessions is likely neither to over-estimate nor to under-estimate their value, but, looking upon all as a trust from God, to develop in the highest sense of the word a keen eye for business, inasmuch as he knows himself to be but the steward of another's possessions.

Bring, then, your humility into the street, into the market place, into the office, and test it by seeing how far it incapacitates you for your work, and see if you cannot round it off by the practical work-a-day facts of life. Do not be afraid ; it will not be soiled by contact with all this earthly dross ; it thrives there, it becomes vigorous and healthy ; it will shine all the brighter in that apparently uncongenial atmosphere, and it will show you a side of it that you never knew before—a courage amounting almost to daring, an undaunted pluck where less humble men hold back in fear, a firmness altogether supernatural, yet so practically useful that it gives its possessor at once an advantage. Yes, the practical side balances, develops, and perfects the spiritual. A humility that can only thrive in the cloister or the closet cannot be the Christian virtue which is meant for all. Indeed, we may believe that the most humble dweller in the cloister, if he were sent forth from it by God to enter for a time into the concerns of business, if he were truly humble, would surprise men by showing that he

had an amazing power of taking care of himself, for the training ordinarily to be gained in the world is given in extraordinary ways for special vocations.

And it is the same with all the Christian virtues: the most refined and the most delicate, they thrive in the boisterous and stormy ways of the world. Do not keep them for the closet; bring them out and test them in the street.

That patience that was getting just a touch of weakness, a readiness to give in, in some matter of duty, rather than risk a fall—look at it now, in the noise and struggles of a public life; see how quickly it is ridding itself of every remnant of that weakness that would have been its destruction; it is now matured to its proper growth, and shows a strength that is only equal to its gentleness.

It is in the formation of the practical virtues that these rich effects of Christian character are developed and matured. Neglect the natural virtues of the practical life and the others will become weak and morbid. Such appears to be the bracing doctrine of this Parable. It gives a note of warning to religious people that is not unnecessary. Look, it says, at the wit and cleverness and the power of taking care of himself of this unscrupulous man, transfer all these gifts that he has shown to the Christian character, and instead of suffering from these earth-born gifts they will perfect the heavenly. The more distinctively Christian graces, if sublimated, and separated from the natural virtues, become weakened and diseased. The most delicate of them is far more robust than you imagine. Go out with them into all

the thronged activities of life, where you have to deal with men and fight your way, and behold the natural virtues developed in contact with all these sordid and unspiritual things will rise up and crown the gifts of grace, and show you what they are capable of.

Dives and Lazarus

DIVES AND LAZARUS

'There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.'—S. Luke xvi. 19–31.

XVIII

DIVES AND LAZARUS

In this Parable our Lord lays vividly before us the true issues of life. He draws a picture full of startling contrasts, both here and hereafter, which forces us to consider the meaning of life in its essence, and apart from its mere accidents. We naturally are apt to lay undue stress upon the accidental part; here we are led to give its proper weight to each part. We are shown first two men in the setting of their lives here on earth; we see each in the framework of their circumstances, then we are allowed to see these same men with all the surroundings of life removed; they are taken out of their setting that we may see more clearly what they are, or, rather, it would be more true to say we see them amidst other surroundings, each in the spiritual setting which he has made for himself by his life on earth.

In all life there are two ways of estimating the probable value of men: one by the direct study of their characters, the other by the examination of all the circumstances and privileges with which they are surrounded. There are everywhere to be found great men living amidst surroundings so meagre and so poor that few can recognise their greatness, and there are small men whose lives are set amidst such sparkle and glitter that we cannot tell how small they are.

One is the greatness of personal character, the other is the greatness of condition, circumstance, accidents. We know the difference, the greatness, of privilege and the inherent greatness of character. One man lives in a set of circumstances that sets him off to the best advantage; another may find his lot cast where everything is against him. The two things are really quite distinct, yet it is difficult to keep them distinct when we come to form our judgment of men. We are constantly tempted to allow the conditions of life to flow over and to get mingled with the life itself.

We Christians have, as Christians, a knowledge of God that the wisest and the best men before Christ never dreamed of. Yet, in fact, many an individual Christian knows less of God than some of those great seekers after truth. The Christian is living in an atmosphere and amidst institutions that insure to him a knowledge which may have very little that is personal about it, while all that the other knew was his own, the outcome of his own personal effort and greatness. Every man living in civilised society and enjoying its privileges appears to be far superior to a savage; yet there are some in the heart of barbarism who, as men, in spite of everything in life tending to drag them down, are far superior to many who are the product of civilisation. Place the one who merely reflects his surroundings and the atmosphere in which he lives, and has never assimilated any of its gifts; place such a one in some savage land, and he will soon show what he is; or take the other and put him in the midst of civilised society, and he will at once rise and reveal himself. The one has nothing of his own;

whatever the other has is all his own. A diamond in the sunlight throbs with the brilliant colours that seem to flow out of its very heart, but place it in a dark room and the glimmer from a dying candle is brighter than it. The one is dependent for all its marvel of brilliancy upon a source of light outside of itself, the other has the light within it.

And thus we may try to form an estimate of what a man is worth by studying him under the reflected light of his surroundings, or by the direct study of the man's character in itself. We may consider a man whose life has been spent in the sunshine of every genial and sympathetic influence, surrounded by friends that love him, and by the material comforts that smooth the hard edges of life; in such an atmosphere he reflects all the brightness and love with which he is surrounded. He does more than reflect it; like the diamond, he produces from this atmosphere new effects that apparently flow out directly from his own personality. Yes, he may even seem to be the centre and source of all that is most beautiful and most brilliant in his surroundings, and yet, take him out of all this—place him in the dark—put him where there is nothing to reflect, where he must himself be the source and fountain of light and joy and sympathy, or be lost in the darkness that surrounds him; and how often all that seemed his own is at once seen to be but the reflection from things external to himself! And, on the other hand, how often we see men who by their own inherent greatness or goodness shine out and transform the most meagre and squalid surroundings!

Now the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus brings out this in a very striking way.

Our Lord depicts for us two men who stand out in remarkable contrast in every way. With a few graphic touches He describes the circumstances and scenes amidst which the life of each was spent. He dwells at first upon these external matters alone: they are the things that at once force themselves upon observation. He describes the one living surrounded by all the good things that life has to give. He was rich, and had all that riches bring with them—friends, comforts, enjoyment. The setting of his life was all that could be desired. It would be a misapprehension of the whole Parable to suppose that there is anything to be condemned in all this. There are other rich men described for us in Holy Scripture who were amongst the best. Job, 'the greatest of all the men of the East,' and at the same time 'a perfect and an upright man, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.'[1] Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, who was 'very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold.'

So far our Lord says nothing about the man. He describes only his circumstances. And He describes the other living amidst surroundings the exact opposite of all this. Lazarus was a beggar living in abject poverty and want; every detail of the picture brings out squalor, misery, and wretchedness. Dives had everything, Lazarus had nothing. There was everything to draw out all the latent powers and gifts that were in the one. Such circumstances ought to develop a man. All the genial and

[1] Job i. 8.

beneficent forces of life play upon him, and keep at a distance those ruthless powers that hurt and maim so many lives. And around Lazarus is gathered just those forces that beat down and crush men ; that make development, education, refinement, impossible ; that draw out all that is worst and lowest and most animal. It would seem as impossible for life to develop and ripen in beggary and squalor and disease as for a flower to blossom in the nipping frost.

As we look at the setting of the two pictures, knowing as yet nothing of the men that are to be placed in them, we feel that all the chances are in favour of the rich man and against the beggar. The one must be developed, the other destroyed by the outward conditions of his life.

Then our Lord turns to the *men*. What effect is all this having upon them? So far as it is possible to see and to judge them as they live before us, how have their characters formed? There is a vast deal in character that it is impossible for us to know, but we shall fail of getting the full meaning of the Parable if we attribute good or evil to either of these men other than is told us.

What, then, do we know of the characters of the two men whose lives are lived under such different conditions? We are told only one characteristic of each. Dives was hardened by his wealth : he could see unmoved a starving beggar lying at his gate. And Lazarus—the whole picture is the embodiment of the grace of patience. That is all. That is all that we are explicitly told of either of them, and it is not much perhaps, but it is an index of a good deal. It helps

us at once to perceive that the outward conditions of life were injurious to the one and beneficial to the other. For it will be noticed that these two characteristics are typical: they act as an index to the whole character; they help us to trace out what we cannot see. Hardness towards the beggar at his gate shows that his riches were not merely having a bad effect upon their possessor, but that they were having the very worst effect—that they were tending to produce just that very characteristic which they do produce upon a man who lets them develop, not what is noble, but what is basest in him. It shows that the man's character was not rising up to draw out of its surroundings all their beneficent effects, but that he was basely yielding himself to be moulded and degraded by them. We do not see a will in conflict with powers that in themselves are capable of producing either good or evil, and struggling to get the good out of them, but the very opposite; there has been no conflict, or if there has it has ended in defeat. His wealth has done to him the worst it could do. It has produced the effect which ill-used riches is wont to produce. If the Parable had depicted Dives as proud, or ill-tempered, or a sensualist, or all of these together, it would not have told us as much about him as is disclosed by the one fact of his hardness and selfishness in the presence of a starving beggar at his gate. For this shows us the whole relation of his character to his surroundings; the outward accidents of life were having it all their own way with him. Character was not strong enough to stand out against them.

And with Lazarus it was just the reverse. The natural effect of want and misery in the presence of affluence is to develop discontent, bitterness, impatience. The rich man could give all that he needed to satisfy his hunger without missing it, and he would not. Poverty and starvation and disease in the very presence of abundance! We know what a passion of bitterness it often does excite. But here is a man who in the face of all this is the very picture of patience and gentleness. There must be something in this man more strong and masterful than his surroundings; he is forcing all those things, whose nature is to curse, to bless him. This special virtue shining out in brilliant contrast to all the outward conditions of life is a revelation of the man, more so, perhaps, than anything that could have been told us about him, for it shows us the energy of character at work, struggling with, triumphing over, outward things, crying out, 'I will not let you go until you bless me.'

Nothing in itself is of any account, so the Parable warns us, except in so far as it affects character. A yielding and plastic will ends in moral failure though outward circumstances may be most auspicious. A will that struggles may end in greatness, though all the surroundings of life may be most degrading.

So far, then, we are allowed to see more deeply than we might at first have imagined into the characters of these two men through the one trait that is given us in each case. We see the way the currents of life are flowing: in the one case they are flowing with, in the other against the trend of

circumstances ; in the one case character is suffering, in the other it is triumphing over outward things.

This is what is shown us of these two men in the midst of life and while the power of choice is still with them. This is the way each of them is exercising his power of choice and using his opportunities. We get a hint, but nothing more.

Now let us look at them again when they are taken out of all the surroundings of life, and the will has done its work in relation to these things. These outward things are temporary, character is eternal ; but every one of these things, passing and ephemeral though it be, leaves its impress upon character for eternity, for the choices exercised in relation to the things of time form character.

Let us study these two men, then, when all the drapery of their life is removed, and each is seen stripped of everything except those results which he bears within himself.

First, 'The rich man died, and was buried ; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.'

Out of all the riches that crowded upon his life on earth, Dives has taken nothing away with him. His nature is now consumed with thirst ; it had been

always resting and feeding upon things outside of himself; they belonged to him so much that they seemed a very part of himself. These riches enabled him, while he owned them, to gather around him what supplied his needs; he did not perceive that they were but creating needs and stimulating wants which became more and more persistent as time went on. They were in truth impoverishing his nature, not enriching it, for they were making him more and more dependent upon his surroundings, less and less personally independent. The abundance of his surroundings hid from him the fact of the impoverishment of his person. He himself was dwindling away into insignificance in proportion as the passing wants of his nature could be supplied and temporarily quieted by what his wealth provided. But out of all this he was in truth gaining nothing but new wants. The nature that might have turned to God, and become in Him more and more independent, and in a sense self-sufficient, was drifting into and losing itself in the things that were, in fact, enslaving it. The effect of his riches was exactly the opposite to what it seemed to be. They seemed to develop the man, to give him importance, to endow him with power, to make him great; but as a matter of fact they were sapping the springs of his personality and making him merely the needy centre of ten thousand wants which one day must show themselves in all their ugliness. How very difficult it is for us to perceive that all those external things that create new demands are not really riches, for they only make our nature more needy. How hard it is for those

who can at once supply from without the newly developed cravings of their nature to perceive that all these things are in truth making them *personally* poorer, and that he alone is truly rich who carries within himself the exhaustless supply of all his wants!

And so we are allowed to see this rich man, whose riches on earth had mastered him and moulded him, when he is taken out of them all. There he is now stripped and solitary, burning in the flame of desires which have been awakened by his earthly surroundings. He is a living centre of want. His nature is parching from the supreme needs which earth has awakened, but now in the naked solitude of his own personality he finds nothing wherewith to slake his thirst. There is nothing in him to satisfy the cravings which have been created by outward things. He never perceived before how absolutely apart from himself those things were upon which he depended. Now he knows that of all the riches that crowded upon him, and enclosed him once, he has in truth appropriated nothing. They have had power over *him*; he has wielded no power over them; he left himself in their hands, and they have created within him a very hell of undying and unsatisfied cravings. The riches of life have left the man so poor that in his need he turns to the beggar whom he had despised for a drop of water, and even that he cannot get.

And then the beggar. What have the abject surroundings in which he lived done for him? We saw that they did not embitter him and make him impatient, but it would be better to be impatient than to

be merely cowed and beaten by want till there is not enough spirit left to rebel. Was this the effect of his poverty upon Lazarus? No, he turns to another world for consolation; he finds it in God and the Communion of saints. The beggar is on familiar terms with Abraham and with the Angels. The energy of a character that refuses to be crushed turns away from a world which denies to him the very necessaries of life, and gathers around him the companionship of Heaven. This is the secret of his patience; he knows that there are deeper wants than those of the body, and he seeks to satisfy them. He does not waste his strength in repining for what he cannot get, but he turns the whole force of his nature to get what is within the reach of faith. As he lies at the rich man's gate, outwardly the picture of abject misery, his inner being is all alive, astir, awake, stretching out beyond the visible world, and he gathers around his soul the riches of Heaven. Thus he meets and fights against the natural tendency of his surroundings. He refuses to be moulded by them; he rises above them and through them; he compels them by the force of his own character to bless him. Starvation, bodily suffering, a bare and inhospitable world, cannot cow the strength of this man's will nor chill his heart. He cannot work, he is too weak and ailing—everything here below is against him. Well, then, he will turn to Heaven. And he does, and Heaven opens to him, and comes down to comfort him.

There he is, awaiting the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. Of this world's goods he has

nothing ; all his riches are his own. He will be no poorer when he dies. He carries with him all his possessions, a character that suffering and want cannot bend—strong, resourceful, spiritual. When he has suffered and borne the last agony that this world can inflict, his eyes open upon the world to which he had turned for support, and he is carried by the Angels to Abraham's bosom.

Thus each of these men taken out of the temporary setting of their earthly lives shows the lasting results which have been left upon their characters, and each goes to the place for which his earthly discipline was preparing him—Dives to Hell, Lazarus to Abraham's Bosom.

The Pharisee and the Publican

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

'And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'—S. Luke xviii. 9–14.

XIX

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

THERE is nothing more remarkable in our Lord's dealings with people than His gentleness and considerateness. It had been foretold of Him long before, 'He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His Voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.'[1] He ever respected personal life, and by His treatment of men He taught them self-respect. He treated their difficulties as realities, and answered them or led them to see the answer for themselves. He saw latent possibilities of good where none others did, and led on those who came to Him gently, lovingly, wisely. If we were to speak of Him—which of course is impossible—merely as a human teacher, we should say He never made a mistake in His method of dealing with people; whether in speaking to a multitude or to an individual, we feel instinctively that He said just the right thing, that which was most likely to do good and to draw out whatever latent good there was in those whom He was addressing.

Yet there was one exception, the more remarkable from the fact that it stands out in such extraordinary contrast to all the rest. His language to the Pharisees is quite unlike His language to all others whom He addressed: it stands quite alone,

[1] Isaiah xlii. 2, 3.

without a parallel ; to them His language was always the same, stern and terrible denunciation. He does not speak to them words that would even seem likely to lead them on or to draw them to Himself ; all that He says to them has a tone of scornful contempt. He never said a word to the greatest sinner, or to the most degraded class of sinners that would lead them to despise themselves, still less that would lead them to suppose that He despised them. To the Pharisees He does ; He uses words which neither they nor the multitudes which heard them could for a moment misunderstand. 'Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?'[1] 'Ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.'[2] 'Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.'[3] 'The publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.'[4] How strange such words sound compared with those He used to the woman taken in adultery. 'Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee : go, and sin no more.'[5] Or to the Magdalene, 'Thy sins are forgiven.' Or to the woman of Samaria, who was living in sin.

Yet strange as His words sound to us who know something of the real character of the Pharisees, they must have sounded far stranger and more incomprehensible to those who heard them. For we must not forget that we know the Pharisees only as they have

[1] S. Matt. xxiii. 33. [2] *Ibid.* xxiii. 13. [3] *Ibid.* xxiii. 15.
[4] *Ibid.* xxi. 31. [5] S. John viii. 10. [6] S. Luke vii. 43.

been exposed to us by our Lord. The power of that revelation has for ever made them despicable to us, so much so that we are apt to imagine that the word Pharisee was even in those days a term of reproach; but, on the contrary, it was an honoured and respected name. 'They *had* their reward,' and their reward was the praise of men. Men did praise and reverence them. They appeared in their day as the leaders of the devotional life; they were to be seen constantly in the temple courts, at the corners of the streets, everywhere, at their prayers. They were strict to the very letter in all the observances of the law, in most things going beyond, in some things far beyond what was commanded. They would probably be pointed out in their day by the religious leaders in Jerusalem as the strength of their Church, always to be depended upon, never failing, faithful in worship, fasting, and almsgiving.

Yet it was of such men as these, highly respected and strictly religious, that our Lord said, 'How can ye escape the damnation of hell?' 'The publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.' It was these men that He singled out for His denunciation and His scorn. No wonder that His language seemed incomprehensible. Were there not sinners enough, open, flagrant, against whom to utter His denunciations, rather than against men whose religious character stood so high? Yet, on the contrary, He had none but words of gentleness towards sinners. 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest;' towards the Pharisees nothing but scorn.

'He did indeed censure by implication, in each

precept of purity, of charity, of humility, every impure man, every drunkard and glutton, every malignant man and every proud man ; but, looking on His attitude towards Jewish society and the different portions and sections of it, we find that when He came to actual classes of men in it, the Pharisee was the only *class* which He cared or thought it appertaining to His work and mission publicly to expose. He singled them out of the whole mixed mass of Jewish society for this purpose.' [1]

He compares the Pharisee with the Publican, everywhere and justly looked down upon as a class, and He says the Publican shall enter the kingdom of God before him. A Publican was a man who practically had no character to lose. He was a social outcast. He was looked upon as being so bad that no one expected anything of him. He had acquired a kind of recognised prerogative in dishonesty. A Publican was a man to be avoided, to have as few dealings with as possible.

Who could ever dream of comparing two such classes of men—the most religious and the most immoral—the proverbial type of goodness and of badness? They stood upon two wholly different planes ; there seemed to be no point in which they could meet to be compared ; men whose whole life and interest gathered round sacred things, and men who had sold their souls for gain. Yet our Lord compares them, and His judgment is in favour of the Publican. 'The publicans shall enter the kingdom of God before you.'

[1] See Canon Mozley's University Sermons.

Now we naturally ask, Why does our Lord use towards this class alone, of all whom He dealt with on earth, words so strangely at variance with His uniform method of gentleness and love? He tells us Himself, or rather He points out enough to enable us to draw our own conclusion.

He allows us to see representative men of these two classes at their prayers, as they speak with God. You can tell pretty well what a man is if you can really see into his soul as he stands before God. We know little about Jacob's public life that could enable us to understand why one so weak should be called a prince who had power with God. It is only as we are admitted into his inner life of prayer that we understand it. It is hard for us to understand the language that God uses about David, whose character was marred by such grave faults; we cannot find the reason in the record of his history; it is only as we read his Psalms that we see the greatness of his soul. If his history records his terrible fall, the Psalter tells us of the depth of his penitence. In the Magnificat we get for a moment a glimpse into the crystal depths of the almost entirely hidden life of her whom all generations call Blessed.

So if we would really get at the heart of all the good and evil in Pharisee and Publican, we must see into their souls as they stand in the presence of the All Holy God.

What are these Pharisees saying in the Temple courts and in the corners of the streets? What great virtues are they striving after; what lingering remnants of sin are they entreating pardon for? What is the secret of their inner life? All this constant

prayer betokens a needy nature looking to God for help. Those who pray most feel most their own sinfulness. As men passed by these Pharisees, so eager in their spiritual longings that they pray anywhere and everywhere, they must have looked with reverence on men who walked with God, and humbly wondered at those who were so far above themselves. And then our Lord discloses the secret. This is what these Pharisees are saying and thinking. 'God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.'

That was all. Whatever the lengthened and redundant form of words might be, that was the substance of all his prayers in God's Presence, in whose sight the heavens are not clean. This Pharisee has no sense of sin, nothing to repent of; he utters no cry for pardon. He accuses himself of no fault, either great or small —nothing left undone which he ought to have done. He is perfectly satisfied with himself, and supposes that he has satisfied all that God could require of him.

When Isaiah saw the vision of God in the Temple, he trembled with fear, and cried, 'Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.'[1] When Peter witnessed the manifestation of our Lord's power in the miraculous draught of fishes he cried, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'[2] But the Pharisee has no such fear. He is more at his ease with God Almighty than Isaiah or Peter. In the Presence of the All Holy God

[1] Isaiah vi. 5. [2] S. Luke v. 8.

he can only give expression to the completeness of his smug self-content. How could he repent? He was not conscious of having done anything that needed repentance. How could he advance? He was not conscious of any higher standard required of him than he had already reached. What need had he of God's mercy or of God's grace? He imagined he was as pleasant an object for the eye of God to behold as he was for his own self-contemplation. How could his mind ever grasp the idea of a Saviour or a Redeemer! He was not conscious of the need of either.

He was indeed incapable of repentance, for he had no self-knowledge, which is the first condition of repentance. And, therefore, our Lord said, 'The publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.' For they at least knew their guilt. It is a dangerous state when one has no standard of goodness, when one lives as the publicans and harlots; but it is far more dangerous, it is hopeless, fatal, when one sets one's self a very low standard, and is content to live up to it, and aim at nothing higher.

> Oh! if we draw a circle premature,
> Heedless of fair gain,
> Greedy of quick returns of profit sure,
> Bad is our bargain.

And this was the condition of the Pharisee: he had found some means of keeping down the aspirations of conscience, and teaching it to be content with the very lowest of moral standards. The Pharisee degraded conscience below the place which the heathen gave it. The heathen, at any rate, allowed

it a protest. 'There is indeed nothing in all history more remarkable than the wild and fitful voice of the heathen conscience, which would suddenly wake up out of its trance to pierce heaven with its cries. The heathen conscience was an accuser, a tormentor; it brooded over men, it stung them, it haunted them in their dreams; they started out of their sleep with horror in their countenances, wanting to fly from it and not knowing where to fly. Or if they tried to drown its voice in excitement or passion, it still watched its moment, and would be heard poisoning their revelry and awakening them to misery and despair.

'Compare with this wild, this dreadful, but still this great visitant from another world, the Pharisaic conscience, domesticated, brought into harness. A tame conscience converted into a manageable companion, vulgarised, humiliated and chained, dethroned and deserted by every vestige of rank and majesty.'

As long as there is the sting of conscience, the voice of self-condemnation, there is hope of recovery or advance; but when this has been so dealt with that conscience only echoes the vain approval of self-deceit how can the soul be roused? There is nothing to appeal to; it has already attained its ideal; it is haunted by no sense of incompleteness or dissatisfaction with itself; it can smile approval at the wrath of God against sin, for it is the sin of others, not its own. Spiritually it has nothing to regret, nothing to desire; there are no restless longings within, no aims beyond its reach. It has attained the serenity of an undisturbed peace; it has already reached its goal, and

looking down at the restless struggling world beneath it with a smile of dull self-approval it thanks God that it is not as other men are.

There is one other instance on record of man having attained to this same condition of peace and inward contentment, and only one. In all the life of Christ there never once appears the slightest trace of the consciousness of failure to realise His ideal. We are admitted again and again to witness His intimate communion with the Father, yet in no one of His utterances concerning Himself, in none of the records of His temptations, His trials, His fears, His hopes, His most secret and inmost thoughts and prayers to God, do we ever find so much as a hint of His own imperfection. Never once do we hear from Him a prayer for forgiveness or a cry for deliverance from sin; yet none can doubt that His ideal was a lofty one, the loftiest ever conceived of; it was righteousness, perfect, unswerving obedience to the Will of God. Surely, then, we might expect that the soul which in all human history was the highest and had the loftiest ideal of holiness would feel most keenly its own failure to be holy. Yet we find in Him the most calm, serene, unbroken self-approval. Is His love for holiness, then, all hypocrisy or His belief in His own holiness a miserable delusion? No, He is not deluded. He is no hypocrite. There can be but one alternative. He has realised that very ideal of perfect righteousness of which He spoke so often.[1] His conscience, let us say it reverently, and the conscience of the Pharisee

[1] See *The Gospel and the Age* (Archbishop Magee), 'The Victor manifest in the Flesh.'

are alike in this, that they have both realised their ideals and are at rest.

Such, then, was our Lord's revelation of the inner life of the Pharisee, such were his prayers. This was the emptiness that lay behind all that external show of devotion and communion with God. It was necessary that our Lord should lift the veil and show us this inner blight and stagnation as a warning against the strange possibilities of self-deceit that lie in the human heart and as a justification of His scathing denunciations—'How can ye escape the damnation of hell?' How, indeed, when they had silenced that voice which alone could rebuke them for sin and urge them on to holiness!

But we may ask, further, how could such a condition of things come about; how was it possible so to tamper with conscience and extract its sting?

Conscience is that power which ever warns the soul against evil and urges it on to good. As we watch men advancing in holiness of life we know that every grace that adorns them is the outcome of the conflict between conscience and the lower nature—the law of the mind victorious over the law of the members.[1] The lower nature clings to earth, conscience ever looks heavenward.

But the Pharisees had discovered that there was another force in their nature which could produce apparently the same results as conscience without any of its struggles. For they found this force in the lower nature itself; indeed, it is one of its strongest passions, and coming as it did from the lower nature

[1] Rom. vii. 23.

with which conscience is always at war, its gains were effected without that terrible inner conflict. Self-love, seeking as its reward, not the love of God, but the praise of men, was found to be strong enough to overcome the natural shrinking from sacrifice and discipline which virtue demands, and ended in producing virtues to all appearances as solid and as fair as the product of conscience. Conscience, which was the echo of the approbation of God, was not wanted, and self-love, supported and stimulated by the praise of men, was strong enough to brace the will to action and endurance. Thus they found that they could fast and pray and give tithes and keep from injustice and adultery under the stimulant of the very passion which ordinarily led men to commit these sins and hold them back from prayer. The master passion of our fallen nature was enlisted on the side of what was to all appearance good, and thus the heart was taken out of every virtue, and the springs of all moral action were poisoned. The machinery moved with more ease and rhythm, for the inner conflict was at an end; but the force that set all the machinery of moral life in motion was no longer conscience, but the worst of passions, and consequently the products of this evil were themselves evil though superficially they had the appearance of virtue. Virtue was turned into vice, the good things that the Pharisee boasted of were produced by the passion that was always in the bitterest revolt against conscience and that in other men issued in its natural product of sin. This was the reason of our Lord's startling words of condemnation of men that seemed so good. All those powers

by which men could ordinarily be appealed to, and roused to a sense of sin, were inoperative in them. They were in truth 'not like other men,' as the Pharisee boasted in the temple; no, not even as that Publican at the Temple door. They were, in fact, in a more hopelessly irreclaimable position; they had dethroned and emasculated the power by which alone true virtue can be obtained, and put one of the subtlest powers for evil in its place; their whole inner nature was revolutionised. They were thanking God for things that they ought to have been ashamed of, vices, the worst of vices, decked in the stolen garments of virtue. We can understand our Lord's saying of such men, 'The publicans and harlots with their flagrant sins and the sting of conscience have more chance of entering the Kingdom of God than you.'

Turn for a moment to the despised Publican whom the Pharisee boasts that he is not like. With all his badness we feel ourselves in a purer atmosphere.

It is true the Pharisee is not like this Publican; he is not probably so bad in the sense that he has never done things in themselves so intrinsically evil. But there is this difference between them, the Publican is capable of rising, the Pharisee is not; the unknown, unrecognised evil in the Pharisee is of a more subtle and fatal kind than the gross and flagrant, and we may add heartbreaking, sins of the Publican, just as the evil which corrupts virtue is worse than the evil which is the outcome of passion and strong temptation.

So our Lord reveals to us the inner life of this despised sinner before God. 'Standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes to

Heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.'

His life had been very bad. It was deeply branded by one of the most degrading and hardening of vices—dishonesty. He had probably lost the last protection of the evildoer—self respect—and did not care to keep up appearances. From a human point of view his case was hopeless. But as he stands before God we see three redeeming qualities.

1. He knew his condition; there was no self-deception; he called himself by his proper name—a sinner.

2. He desired to be different; unlike the Pharisee he was dissatisfied, miserable in his sins.

3. He turned to God for help.

And from such a cry for mercy God will not turn away; it was for such that our Lord came down to earth, to seek and to save the lost. Where conscience is awake, and the sinner in helplessness turns to God, forgiveness and restoration are certain. The Publicans and harlots enter the Kingdom of God before the Pharisee.

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